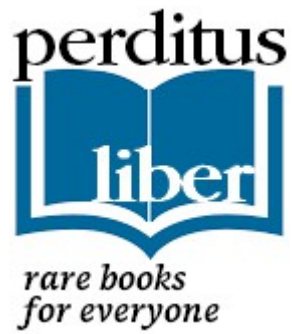




The **CAPTAIN** of the
JEHOVALL

by **H. B. DRAKE**

Author of Cursed Be The Treasure



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The Captain of the Jehovah

by

H. B. Drake

Published 1936

THE CAPTAIN OF
THE JEHOVAH

THE CAPTAIN OF THE JEHOVAH

A DRAMATIC novel of a slave ship plying illicitly off the coast of New Guiana. Its hair-raising adventures, the escape from chains and subsequent mutiny of the slaves, and the character of the fantastic skipper who ruled the *Jehovah's* destinies make this one of the most remarkable stories of its kind ever published. Johnston Kerkhoff who read this manuscript for us wrote: "I think THE CAPTAIN OF THE JEHOVAH is swell. It has the touch that 'Anthony Adverse' had, is well written and rings as true as a factual story. I've read quite a lot about the slave trade and 'The Captain' sticks to facts. I couldn't put the book down, yet at the same time I did not race through it, for the dialogue is excellent, and the old captain's fanaticism fascinating. I would have liked 500 more pages, yet I do believe that much of the charm of the book is due to its brevity. I vote for 'The Captain' 100 per cent."

Of the author's last book, *The New York Times* said: "The story is told with a vim and sweep and gusto that places it head and shoulders above most books of the type." And the *Manchester Guardian* said: "Mr. Drake is to be congratulated on having produced the best story of its kind since Conrad's 'Rescue'."

THE
CAPTAIN OF THE
JEHOVAH

BY
H. B. DRAKE

*Author of Cursed Be the Treasure,
The Schooner California, etc.*



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TO MY SON
ALAN RENDAL

PART ONE

CHAPTER ONE

FOR DAYS we had that dreadful coast in view. It was dreadful to me at the first sight while still no more than a featureless definition between sky and sea. For a landfall was in itself a denial of our purpose, and to me a confirmation of my fears. The *Jehovah* was ostensibly a whaler. I had embarked in the completest good faith, with a vision of open ocean in my eyes, my spirit braced to hardy and stern adventure. But long before we sighted land I had been troubled by the teasing insinuations of my mates into a fretfulness of questioning suspicion.

Particularly Old Sawny had droned a burden to my doubts, maintaining by the half hour in his rhythmless and repetitive way a monologue of half scolding, half amiable banter. "Blubber!" he would say. "The fancies of the younger generation leave me sick, fair sick, that they do. But if it's blubber yer've a taste for, yer'll have

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yer bellyful o' blubber. Yer bellyful o' bloody blubber! Trust me, son; an' it's not such pleasant stuff to handle neither. But yer give me the vomitings with all yer talk. The black vomitings, an' that's the holy truth! Want to be sticking harpoons into innercent whales! An' wot harm've they ever done yer, eh? Ye're a damned little vicious heathen, Joey Brown, that's wot ye are. Ye're the sort that pulls flies to pieces an' blows up frogs. Ye're crooel, that's wot ye are, bone crooel, swelp me Gawd!"

This inconclusive chaff from the ship's veteran, accompanied by cryptic grunts, and received with corroborative chucklings from his fellows, vague as it might be, was clear enough to set me in an alarmed uncertainty. And one day it took on a terrible new meaning. On look-out at the mast-head I had seen in reality what I had already seen so often in my dreams. I rubbed my eyes to make sure it was no fancy. But that slender spouting, far away as it was, was unmistakable. I was elated beyond measure that the first whale of the voyage had fallen to me. I shouted excitedly, "There she blows!" I expected the answering call, "Where away?" and was prepared with "On the weather bow, sir." But Captain Andrew's answer was a stentorian "Come down from aloft there, ye chattering monkey!" and as I hesitated in my bewilderment, a more thunderous "Come down, I say, blast

your eyes!” He continued to revile me as I clambered back to the deck, but when I was hailed before him on the poop he only fixed me for a while with his melancholy stare, and at last said quite

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mildly, “You mind your business, Joey; this isn’t the time to get seeing whales.”

There were other indications, plenty and to spare, so that I might have been prepared; yet the “Land ho!” when it came startled me like a sudden knocking in the night. There was a rush for the side, and a straining of eyes. The horizon hardened into a black thread, intensifying as we drew nearer, growing at length into a wall of sombre and formless vegetation above a white line of surf whose booming set the air in a shaken resonance.

“That’s the Guinea coast, that is, Joey,” I heard Old Sawny say. He nudged my elbow, and repeated, “That’s the Guinea coast.” He meant me to understand something, for he grunted with a husky rattle of the throat which was his way of emphasising some obscure significance. “Git yer harpoon into that, son,” he went on. “It’s alive, though it don’t look it. Oh yes, it’s alive, yer’ll find. It’ll wriggle an’ squeal, something terrible it will. Blubber, yer said; it’s all alive with black blubber. Foul an’ nasty stuff. But don’cher mind me,” he added more kindly. “Yer’ll see with them two mighty observant eyes o’ yours. Enough for a life-time. Hell’s own plenty, swelp me Gawd!”

He patted me on the head in a manner almost affectionate, and shuffled away.

The boom of the surf and the commenting voices about me mingled in a humming accompaniment to my dismayed brooding. Yet it would have been difficult to put a name to my perturbation. That mute edge

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of jungle held no visible menace. I had no doubt that life was concealed there, as Old Sawny had said; but no life showed. Yet it watched without eyes; it followed without motion. It drew ... I was conscious of a darker sinking of my mind. It was not that we had come there merely. Through the hushed torpor of the air, over the sluggish heave of the water, there came a force, a spell....

I seemed to be tracking an elusive ghost through shadows when I was shaken to awareness by a hearty slap on the shoulder and Nick’s gay voice

exclaiming, "Well, sober chops, what's up now?"

The effect was to throw me for a moment into a violent rage; and I let out an angry oath.

"Christ!" he rejoined. "Little black dog, and all that! Well, go to hell then, old boy!" And he began a nonchalant whistling.

"Look here, Nick," I took him impulsively by the arm, "there's something here—something in all this—it isn't aboveboard."

"Aren't we nautical?" he cut in with flippant mockery.

"Oh, all right," I retorted, letting him have my back, "if it's all the same to you——"

"Well, what is the matter?" he asked. "Bad news from home? Has the guinea-pig died? But cheer up, they grow wild in these parts, I'm told."

One couldn't be angry with Nick for long. His cheery voice and jaunty air—even his amusingly infantile tempers—were a tonic for ill moods. But with my mind

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worrying at the meaning of this new turn to our adventure his irresponsible good humour jarred discordantly.

"Nick," I said, not yet entirely appeased, "we're in for trouble, only you're too blind to see. Any other place—all this——"

I indicated with a vague sweep of the arm the sullen rampart of the land.

"Well, I suppose there are girls there, old boy."— He treated me to another of his boisterous slaps—"And the colour doesn't come off, you know. As hot as coals too, I'm told! Gad, Joey, this salt and virgin sea! How long have we had of it? Two weeks? Two months? Two years? At any rate, it leaves a fellow with an itch worse than the nettle-rash. I'm for a spell of Jack ashore."

He pinched me mischievously, and his green-grey eyes looking merrily into mine were a-dance with a frank anticipation.

"Look here, none of that," I said in some concern.

He broke into a peal of laughter, then abruptly becoming sober challenged me with, "Well, why not?" He didn't wait for further expostulations, but declared defiantly, "You can do what you like, but I'm jolly well going to have my fling."

He began to pout, and I fell to chaffing him in my turn and so forgot for a little my obsession. I argued the matter this way and that, half in earnest, half in jest, but he would only answer me peevishly, "You're a prig! You're

always preaching! You're just a prig!" adding by way of more annihilating condemnation, "And

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what's more, you're a silly ass. Because you'll find when you're a grandpa that there's nothing so deadly to look back on as a youth of virtue. I'm going to be wise in time, and lay in a store of hectic memories to chew on when I'm old. You'll sit in your chimney-corner and grouse while I sit and chuckle. So if the beauties over there roll their round eyes at me,"—he seized me about the waist, his petulance blown by like a squall—"why, it's up heels and in we go!"

Over there!

I suppose my face shadowed once more to its earlier distress, for Nick exclaimed, "Damn, you're at it again!" and incontinently left me.

He was a dear fellow, and already I began to feel that I might find in his facile sanity a surer stay than in my own tormented conscience, but for the moment he was too incongruously at odds with my mood to help me. All this meant nothing to him, nothing! I ached with all my heart to be able to yield to the unknown with his boyish abandon. But something in that blank and level monotony of coastline set me in a fevered foreboding. A power emanated from its unchanging solitude, a power oppressive like the air, uneasy like the water, a power—the illusion returned upon me with an irresistible mastery—that had laid a spell upon us, drawn us....

This time it was the bo'sun's whistle that shrilled into my brooding.

All hands were summoned aft.

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CHAPTER TWO

CAPTAIN ANDREW was already awaiting us as we ranged up in a double row under the poop. A single glance at him set my heart in a fearful thumping. He stood looking down at us, a powerful tall figure, his body straight, his head erect, his hands gripping the rail before him. His long bearded face, always drawn into a fixed melancholy, was set now as though in some stern resolution. There was something unusual in his image-like rigidity, something beyond his inevitable air of assured command, which crushed me with a sense of overwhelming domination. I deliberately turned my eyes away.

His two officers stood whispering together at a short remove. Oslo, a Scandinavian,—I could never place him more precisely—might have been cast in some ancient viking mould. His blue eyes, his drooping blond moustaches, his whole enormous girth, formed a single harmonious picture of the Norseman of the old harrying days. His face, too, though featured pleasantly enough, could take on a sudden ferocity from which you recoiled appalled. Yet when he laughed the ship seemed to tremble

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in all her timbers to his enormous guffaws. Louis—it was the name he chose to go by, plain Monsieur Louis—was an altogether different man. He was French; yet we didn't call him Froggy, but simply Mousou. He was of slight trim build, with shining dark eyes and clear-cut features, and with such an easy elegance in his whole bearing that we credited without dispute the legend that had somehow grown up about him that he came of an aristocratic family ruined in the Revolution. He stood with his hands behind his back, rising and falling on his toes, his face expressing a rather cynical amusement, his lips moving almost imperceptibly as he muttered some comment to Oslo, who with arms akimbo accorded him an occasional nod. But I forgot these two on the instant when Captain Andrew began abruptly?

“Men!”

He made his announcement with a terse precision:

“It is now time to tell you. This ship is no whaler. We have come for slaves.”

It seemed impossible that so brief a statement should be of such terrible import. I believe I expected a clap of thunder, or a sudden darkening of the sun. But the air retained its torpid immobility, the sky remained a brazen glow. Only the ship rose slowly to a long swell and as gently subsided, as though the ocean had drawn a deep breath.

“I intend to deal justly with you,” the Captain went on. “I give you free choice: you may bide by the ship, or you may go. If you bide, you must take this into your

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reckoning, that if we’re taken it’s a hanging matter; but if we win through—and I have never failed yet—there’s a pound for every man of you for every nigger landed alive. But”—his voice hardened—“you bide then to the end of the journey. And my word will be the voice of God to you, afloat or ashore. I say, afloat or ashore—the voice of God!” He paused a moment, then with an arm stiffly raised towards the land, but with regard still sternly bent upon us, he said more quietly, “But if you choose to go—the way is clear.”

His arm fell listlessly to his side with a suggestion of relaxed control; but somehow that simple gesture managed to convey the impression that the alternative was a mere sop tossed in pity to the pusillanimous.

I threw a furtive glance across the water at that coast of evil reputation. Walled in behind its leagues of formless jungle it seemed to me a poor refuge for the timid. But my gaze was immediately drawn back to the Captain, for his eyes travelling the length of our ranks with a slow severity had come to rest on me, singling me out from my companions with a deliberate scrutiny, as he cried:

“Those who wish to go—step forward!”

I felt the challenge directed at me, like the straight thrust of a spear. I suppose that roused me; for though all that I was conscious of was an utter impotence to shift a foot, I yet found myself taking a smart couple of paces to the front, and heard myself boldly declaring:

“I wish to go, sir.”

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I felt a hand tugging at me from behind, and could just make out Old Sawny’s voice growling, “Come back, yer damned little fool!” I shook

myself free of him, and stood facing the Captain with a sinking heart but with a show of resolution.

“You—Joey—” he said.

I was more shaken than if he had cursed me. I knew that my defection had wounded him to the soul. Any other he would have dismissed with a sniff of scorn, I was convinced of it; but for a moment his face took on a look of immense sorrow which made me want to go back upon my action.

“Only you——”

I was in a torment of uncertainty, repelled by the horror of his revelation, drawn by the appeal of his distress, but bewildered from clear thinking by such an inexplicable betrayal of emotion. Yet I believe I was about to cry out, “No sir, I will stay,” when Nick stepped up beside me and linked his arm in mine.

“Not only Joey, sir,” he said with a certain insolent bravado; “I’m going too.”

The Captain’s face grew severe again.

“Joseph Brown and Nicholas Gale,” he said judicially, “you have made your choice and I have given my word.”

Then with an air of having completely forgotten us he addressed the men behind us.

“Mind what I’ve told you,” he said. “To the end of the journey! Afloat or ashore! The voice of God!—This ship is now in a state of war.”

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Without according Nick and me another glance he turned abruptly away, leaving us standing there in a rather foolish isolation.

“Look here,” I swung round angrily on Nick, “why did you do it?”

“Well,” he laughed, “I’m hanged if I want to be hanged.”

“You’ve no scruples,” I declared.

“Why,” he retorted hotly, stepping back a pace, “be damned to you then for a blasted young prig!”

I don’t know what stupid vituperations were fuming at my lips, but the quarrel was cut short by an oath from the bo’sun shouting us back to duty.

It was out of pure friendship that Nick had stood by me, and I knew it; yet wretched with the consciousness of my pitiful vacillation I could only rage and scold.

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CHAPTER THREE

IT WAS at the end of the first dog watch that we had been summoned before the Captain. At eight bells I felt a certain diffidence at facing the fo'c'sle. I had to reckon on a deal of chaff, and I was in no mood for it. Or rather, there was so exasperatingly elusive a significance in the affair that the lightest banter would jar. But the night had already fallen, and I couldn't moon about the deck; so I composed my face to an obstinate defiance—it was a trick I was notorious for—and strode in.

“Oh fawver!” was the exclamation I heard as I entered.

For a moment I thought it was directed at me, and by the one member of the whole crew whose mockery at that moment would have been utterly beyond endurance. But I was saved from an irreparable outburst by hearing Nick's voice in teasing reply:

“Oh yes, Cocky, and didn't you see the rats leave the ship? While the Old Man was talking. They thought no one was looking. But I spotted them; great swollen sods, swimming nose to buttock. You could have walked

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ashore on the bridge they made. That's what settled me to quit.”

“Oh fawver!” Cocky exclaimed again, “can'cher let a feller alone?”

The matter had taken an unexpected turn. It was Nick who was on the offensive. And I hadn't realised till then that I had selfishly left him to fight our battle single-handed.

“You'd better see the Old Man in the morning,” he went on. “He'll let you go all right. He'll tell you to join the other rats.”

There was a general laugh at this, while I slipped unobserved to my bunk.

It was clear how the wind lay. Nick had somehow turned the tables by setting up the little Cockney as a counter butt. And to some purpose, because the wretched fellow was almost in tears with terror and vexation.

Papa on the bunk next to mine was sitting up hugging his knees, his mouth open in a grin of vacant amusement. He had a way of saying inane things and winking laboriously with one eye to suggest some profound

innuendo. Seeing me beside him he treated me to such a wink, and said in a hoarse whisper, "You were the wise one, sonny."

As I made no reply he winked a second time, squeezing down his eyelid with immense effort as though the closing of one eye at a time were a matter of muscular prowess; and repeated, "You were the wise one."

In the smoky flare of the tallow candles I could see

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the rest of our watch, all with heads raised towards Cocky who lay muffled up in his blanket with his face just showing, thin and frightened.

"Looks like a rat too, come to think of it," Pips took up the jest in a slow drawl.

"On'y—where's his tail? That's wot I'd like some un to tell me."

"Keeps it wrap round 'im fer a belly-belt."

"And that's where them biscuits o' mine gorn to."

The cheap badinage continued.

Old Sawny cleared his throat on a long rattling grunt.

"It an't so funny as all that comes to," he said. "Not 'arf it an't, swelp me Gawd! There's a deal more in this business than some on yer would care to lay to. The Old Man has had his luck, and I'm the one that knows it. But when luck turns, it turns good an' all. Catches yer fair aback, it does; like a slap on the face from a wench yer've been a-cuddling an' a-kissing when yer tries that extra inch yer didn't orter. An' with a ship-load o' black cattle a-board—I tell yer, I've heard things, an' I've seed things too. I've seed things, swelp me Gawd! Seed things to freeze yer marrow, seed things to make yer kidneys rattle. Yer lay there and shiver, Cocky, yer've reason to. Let 'em say all they will, they won't make yer dream the 'arf, not the 'undreth, o' wot I seed done. With them black cattle a-board—'tan't on'y plagues and mutinies. It's something more'n that; something I an't heard a name for; something evil, bone evil; a sort o' shadder—I dunno——"

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His voice sank into an inconsequential grunt, guttered out, you might say, like a candle. And for a little there was a complete silence. Not one of us moved. Huddled on our bunks, obscure figures with faces showing pallid through the smoky haze, and with white eyes blankly staring, we might have been a row of corpses in the dusky confinement of some charnel.

“Oh fawver!” Cocky muttered, and buried his face beneath his blanket, while his teeth started into an audible rattle.

“There, don’cher mind me,” Old Sawny began again. “Mem’ries of an ole man wot’s seed things he hadn’t orter, that’s all. A bad ole man, swelp me Gawd! But it an’t all black. And this ship’s all right. Cap’n Andrew an’t the one to lead yer into trouble. It’s others I’m remembering. Men wot didn’t ’ave Cap’n Andrew’s luck. Wot with the flux and the ’thlmy, and the yaws from the black women. Just steer clear there, Cocky, that’s all. If yer go dipping yer bucket into them dirty wells ye’re arsking Gawd on yer bended knees fer a dose o’ trouble.”

“Dat is also true,” Fritz chimed suddenly in, waving excited arms. “Yes I tell you so. I haf known some like it, so that I am big balloon and must waddle so like an old duck. Oh yes, I tell you so. But I gif you dis for a secret only; it is not necessaire that you speak dis to some one.”

We laughed merrily, and the tension was broken.

Old Sawny curled himself up on his bunk, and with

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a last muttered, “Don’cher mind me,” started a hoarse snoring.

There was more talk yet. Nerves were not entirely composed. The underlying doubt seemed to be whether Nick and I had not after all chosen the better way. Dusty, a thin and anxious sort of fellow with a light sprinkle of hair, narrated a horrible story which he had probably heard at some anti-slavery meeting—the story of a burning slave-ship abandoned to the flames with the slaves left manacled in the hold—and others added corroborative evidence. From time to time Pips would drawl, “Were you there yourself, did you say?” which would bring forth an indignant gush of circumstantial detail, authenticating the incident back through all its removes to its original and indisputable source, to be capped with, “So how’s that, son? Truth’s truth, ain’t it?” But Cocky was no longer the butt of all this chatter; and it led nowhere.

Nick, who berthed above me, leant over to say good night. There was no sign in his face that he remembered our quarrel, no sign either that he bore me any grudge for leaving him to brave the men alone.

“Funny, isn’t it?” he said. “Don’t thump me if I laugh in my sleep.”

I heard him nudging himself into comfort, and in a little he was still.

But I had matter to keep me awake. You might think it was a clear enough issue. The right and the wrong were so sharply defined; and I had

surely chosen the

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right. Yet the Captain's strange behaviour tantalised me. I tried to tell myself that it was simply that he had stirred my sympathy; but I wasn't satisfied. And Old Sawny's talk had troubled me. In the presence of that sinister dumb coast, felt through the darkness even if not seen, my spirit responded with a strange vibration to the inarticulate horror behind those words: "Evil, bone evil; a sort of shadder——"

And the men? Why had they chosen to bide by the ship? Some had sailed with Captain Andrew before; others were new to it. Was it the simple lure of money? Was it the simpler lack of imagination? I thought of them in turn. There was nothing peculiar about them. They were decent ordinary fellows. One couldn't suspect any latent cruelty in them. Cocky, in spite of his ridiculous aggressiveness, winced before a lifted hand, and wilted at the mere threat of possible danger. Pips was a thoroughly nice chap; quite young, but with a certain poise and mastery about him; not at all the kind to pledge himself in mere thoughtlessness to an undertaking so wantonly wicked. Papa was a dear kindly soul, even if somewhat stupid. One pictured him playing bears with his children, or warning them against overgluttony, as he presided at the table, with some such remark as, "I knew a little boy who ate so much plum pudding that he burst," accompanied by a preposterous wink. Yet he had sailed several times with Captain Andrew. So had Dusty. Perhaps it was that that had given him his anxious air. Yet there was a distinct refinement

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about him. One didn't expect to find him at sea at all, or at least not among the deck hands. His place seemed to be behind an apothecary's counter mixing drugs, mixing them with a scrupulous care, with an aged mother somewhere in the background. Fritz—he was interposing between yarns further details of his unfortunate experiences among black women, laughing and gesticulating, assuring us of his veracity with many a "Yes, yes, I tell you so," and parrying sallies with a flap of the hand and a good-natured "*Geh weg!*"—Fritz was positively the most generous man I had ever met. He was a Bohemian, he told us, and would toss us at unexpected moments odd scraps of his adventures which were difficult to piece into chronological coherence; but they showed him open as a child, with no

shame, no reticence. His behaviour was of the most transparent simplicity. He expressed pleasure or anger with a spontaneous candour; and at the sight of suffering he was at once all nurse. He would sacrifice his blanket or his dinner at another's need without a hint of reluctance. Yet this was his second voyage on this ship. Then there was Chapel, a rather silent man, who spoke usually to remind you that he was a gentleman. I dare say he was, too; at any rate, in spite of a certain weakness of mouth and shiftlessness of manner, he could stand up with a gentle dignity to the chaff he seemed deliberately to invoke. Old Sawny, of course, had grown grey in sin; but he had never hardened. His

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face was an indiscriminate patchwork of grog-blossoms and wrinkles, a little leering possibly, though with features not so much distorted as seeming to have slipped askew; but in all its gin-shop disfigurement there was no malignant line. So with the rest. I could think of one only who might conceivably have his heart in the work: Slobbers, as we called him, the cook. He had been a lumberman in Canada, and could wield an axe with the nicety of a razor, which was a matter of some concern for us, because he was a man of berserk rages who at a thwart word would spring at you with a scream, axe on shoulder, intent on murder. At such times the only safe place was the mast-head, for encumbered by his axe he couldn't pursue you so high; but he would squat for hours on the cross-trees below you, jabbering up at you like an ape, his face, normally the colour of raw meat, flushed to a luminous scarlet, his loose lips dripping with spume. I thought it possible that Slobbers might relish this slaving business. But then, he was mad.

The greatest puzzle of all was the Captain himself. He was such a godly man. The Sabbath was the Lord's Day to him, and he enforced such rigorous observance of it as was possible on board ship. All gaming was forbidden, and twice we were summoned to service when he would address us with a sombre fervour, unquestionably sincere. And except for an occasional oath, inevitable in a sailor, his whole daily bearing confirmed

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his religious zeal. A severe, kill-joy zeal, by which I explained his fixed melancholy of countenance. But all this was violently at variance with his barbarous enterprise.... Yet that wasn't at the root of my perplexity. There

was that peculiar sad softening of his face when I had stood out against him. He had always treated me, I could recall now, somewhat differently from the others. There had been a tenderness, a consideration, as though there were some unavowed relationship between us. And I had not angered him—I had hurt him....

I lay distressedly tossing long after the last yarn had droned itself out. The bells chimed the half hours at weary intervals. Yet without knowing it I must have slept, because when I felt myself being shaken by the shoulder the impression was that some monstrous beast had leapt clean out of the jungle and fastened its teeth into my bone. I started up with an alarmed cry, trying to wrench myself free.

“Steady, son!” a voice said from somewhere behind a lantern that was swinging dazzlingly in my face.

“Why, whatever is it?” I asked.

“The Old Man wants you.”

“The Old Man?” I repeated, still stupid from my dreams.

“Smartly now; show a leg, sonny!” The voice shook me more alertly awake.

I began to pull on my clothes.

“What’s the time?” I asked.

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”Just gone five bells,” the fellow told me.

I had heard four bells some while since. I could only have been asleep a few minutes, yet I still felt half drugged as I stumbled after the lantern on to the deck.

It was cold there, and I shivered.

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CHAPTER FOUR

CAPTAIN ANDREW was pacing the cabin as I entered. I stood for a moment at the doorway uncertain, then timidly announced myself. He uttered a very loud “Ha!” but didn’t so much as turn his face my way. I took a step forward, and came hesitatingly to rest.

The cabin was a spacious apartment, and the single lamp slung from the centre of the ceiling left the walls and bulkheads barely indicated through the darkness. Beneath the lamp was a table which with the light upon it stood sharply cut in a luminous yellow square against the surrounding gloom, but with the under shadow of the lamp sprawled over it like an enormous spider. Somehow this absorbed my attention while the Captain continued his slow pacing. The creature seemed alive to the movement of the flame as though pantingly drawing breath.

“It’s a dark business, Joey,” the Captain suddenly proclaimed.

“Yes, sir,” I said.

He came to an abrupt halt in a far corner where I

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could make out his figure but dimly against the bulkhead, but could distinguish the white of his face turned my way.

“Where are ye?” he asked.

“Here, sir,” I answered.

“I can’t see ye,” he declared with an angry petulance. “Come out into the light, boy.”

I stepped forward.

“Ha!” he exclaimed as he had done before. “Would ye hide from me?” Then more gently, “Sit ye down, boy.”

There were chairs dispersed here and there. I drew up the nearest one and sat down.

“No!” he thundered. “Up to the table; into the light! I want to see ye!”

I obeyed.

He wanted to see me, but he didn’t want to be too clearly seen, for he resumed his pacing, keeping well against the bulkhead where I had him in a momentary half shadow as he passed from obscurity to obscurity.

“I had to talk to ye; it couldn’t bide till the morning,” he began. “Were ye asleep?” he asked, again sharply halting.

“Yes, sir,” I said.

“So,” he rejoined. “Well, sleep all ye can; sleep while ye’re young. But maybe the time’ll come when ye’ll not be able to sleep.”

All this would have been bewildering if it had not somehow melted into the fantasies still clinging to me

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from my bemused dreamings. And there was more of it; for the Captain fell into a monologue of vague disjointed talk whose effect was to set before me his drawn sad face framed, strangely enough, in that spiderlike shadow on the table. Yet when I glanced up at him his face was no more than a formless blur, expressionless and illegible.

“A dark business,” he repeated. “But other than ye think, Joey. Ye’re only a child; but ye’ve got to grow into a man. And that’s not only a matter of working for your bread. It’s a matter of getting the films from your eyes. Ever seen a cicada coming out of its shell? Leaves its goggles behind it as well as its old case. Learns to see clear. And that’s what ye’ll need to learn, Joey. And that’s what I’ll teach ye. Or better, I’ll put ye in the hands of a master. Learn to see clear....”

I sat very upright on my chair, simulating attention. And in a way I was attending, for his words recorded themselves in my mind though my conscious thoughts were busy beating through a ravel of perplexities in which I felt myself increasingly enmeshed.

Six bells rang.

Some inexplicable impulse made me explain, “Nicky Gale is also leaving the ship, sir. Do you want to talk to him too?”

I half started up as though to fetch him.

The Captain drew a chair up to the table and sat down opposite me with a grave deliberation. Leaning across to me with his arms flung out he said very slowly,

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“Your friend Nicky Gale may go to the Devil in his own time and in his own way. He doesn’t concern you and me.”

I sat down again.

Captain Andrew's face was clear to me now. It was a long face with a high brow, scored and tanned by the weather, like that of all sea-faring men, but with a pallour beneath its tan. The white hair divided down the middle fell rather lankly over the ears. The big mouth, set to an unnatural compression, drooped heavily at the corners in lines intensified by the straight fall of the beard into an expression of abiding suffering. The points of the cheek-bones stood out prominently from the sunken cheeks. The flesh of the eye-sockets, falling in flat triple rings, appeared to have been pulled down by some prolonged physical constraint. But the pale grey eyes spoke of something more profound than sadness. They were bright and dry; they had a glitter in them. In a way they were frightening, not in menace, but with some nameless ferocity. It might have been fanaticism; it might have been madness. Not the mere vulgar madness which is the absence of sanity, but a positive and purposeful fury of spirit.

"Now listen!" he commanded, his voice taking on a deep quietude of tone. "I'm going to talk to ye in a manner new t'ye. And it's for both our sakes, ye'll mind. Because I've marked ye, Joey Brown. The others—it was enough to offer them gold. But you're different; ye're a good earnest lad. That's writ in your face for

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all to see. And when we've gathered on the Lord's Day, I've marked ye then—a good earnest lad. I've said, ye might stand conscience to a man, if need were. But not yet awhile; later, when ye've seen and learnt. And it's been on my mind a long while what ye'd do when ye heard the truth. Fifteen times I've had occasion to speak those words; and ye were the first to stand out. The first! ..."

His eyes fixed me piercingly, and suddenly he cried, "Did ye mean to judge me, boy?"

"I didn't know what I was doing," I told him.

"Ye didn't know," he repeated slowly. "Then, if I put the choice to ye again—how then?"

"I'd do the same."

He drew in a deep breath through set teeth.

"Then ye do mean to judge me?" he said.

His penetrating scrutiny unnerved me.

"It's you who are judging yourself, Captain Andrew," I retorted, half in anger, half in tears; and was immediately sobered by my own presumption.

“I’m sorry, sir,” I added. “I didn’t mean to be impertinent.”

His teeth remained set, and he hissed a little in his breathing.

“Yes, it’s a dark business,” he repeated his earlier phrase.

His fingers began drumming on the table; then he clenched his fist, and with a heavy thump exclaimed, “So then, now I will speak. And first, don’t ye think

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for a moment that I’m giving ye a second choice. Ye leave this ship, and for your own good. I’ll put ye ashore at a place I know, and ye’ll see, and ye’ll learn.... And then, boy, ye’ll come back to me. Ye’ll come back, I say! And ye won’t talk of judging! Not when ye’ve learnt to see clear.... But, lad,”—his voice risen to a pitch of excitement softened again—“ye’ll be different then; ye’ll be a man. A man that’s been through the darkness. Because it’s the darkness that clears the eyes....

He seemed to forget me, staring through me at something that held him in an appalled fascination.

“A darkness of hell’s own horrors!” he muttered hoarsely.

I noticed his fists upon the table quivering in an intensity of constraint. I believe if I had risen and left him he would not have noticed my departure.

He sat so for a long time, till at last I shifted in my seat to recall his attention. His eyes contracted upon me again, and he breathed deeply.

“A darkness...” he repeated, feeling back to awareness. “Yes, boy, ye’ll pass through a great darkness. Because, where I’m sending ye, it’s a land of devils. Devils with the curse upon them! Devils!...”

He controlled his agitation with a visible effort.

“See here,” he went on. “Ye’ll have heard a deal of stuff, a deal of stupid stuff, from folk that know no better. From soft-living comfortable folk. They’ve told ye, maybe, of our poor black brothers. Black! Ye’ll find

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them black; black through and through, Joey; black from skin to soul! And that’s the sign of the Lord upon them. The Creator made man in His own image. But is black the colour of the Living God?”

Nick’s frivolous remark, “The colour doesn’t come off, you know,” mingled fantastically with the Captain’s fervent cry.

Perhaps I smiled; I don’t know. But Captain Andrew thumped the table with both fists, and exclaimed, “Ye won’t believe me? Ye’re just a boy, and

ye won't believe me? What do ye know of the Tree of Good and Evil? What do ye know of the Valley of the Shadow of Death? Do ye remember the whisperings at Christian's ear, so that his soul filled with evil imaginings, imaginings rank from the Pit, which he knew were no part of him, yet they possessed him utterly like a foul vapour? Do ye remember? And that's what ye'll find too. Once step ashore there, and ye're a man possessed. Ye'll think things, and ye'll do things, beyond all ye could devise yourself of evil. Ye won't know your own soul for the ugliness ye'll find there. And why? Because it's a land of devils! Devils with the curse upon them! So that ye'll say, as I have said, that could ye with the flat of your hand,"—and he spread his great hand wide upon the table—"could ye with the flat of your hand sink the whole land beneath the sea ye'd be doing the will of the Almighty ... Yet," he added sadly, "the Lord works in other ways...."

He sat for some while meditating abstractedly, then

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he pushed himself sharply upright and said, "But the Lord has blessed my undertaking. He has prospered me wonderfully. He has loaded me with riches." He spoke with a ringing pride, but his pride broke as he leant forward rather wearily and added, "Only—He has left me alone in my old age, and He will not let me rest."

I knew what was coming by the tenderness in his face:

"And I yearn for a son; a son to continue my labours so that I can rest. Joey, ye will be my son."

I said quite quietly, "No."

"But ye will," he declared.

He was mastering me. I felt a tremendous power come from him. It was not merely his strength of command. It was a compulsion of the spirit, so that he seemed not a man, but a force, distorting me from my true nature, dominating me to a rebellious servitude.

"You promised to let me go," I cried.

"Yes," he said, "I will let ye go. But ye will come back to me. Ye will justify me."

"Do you need justification?" I threw at him, and this time I did not apologise for my presumption.

He shouted me down:

"Ye will come back to me, I say! Ye will come back!"

I wilted before him, with my face buried in my hands.

“Listen, boy!” he went on pitilessly. “Ye must know me for what I am. I have been taken in the toils. I have committed black evil. I have been drunk with lust; I have been drunk with blood. I have ministered at strange altars. Yet it was not me, I tell ye, the man that did

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these things; it was not me. I hated it, and was a slave. But the Lord had mercy on me. He drew me from the Pit when the mire had closed over my head—and He gave me this work to do. Can I refuse to do the work of the Lord?”—his voice rose almost to a roar—“It is His vengeance on His enemies, and His wrath is terrible. The wrath of the Lord is terrible! And I—I am but the flail in His hand. Can I refuse?” he repeated. “I, who was altogether given over to Satan? I, who danced, who worshipped, who sacrificed—sacrificed—who denied the Living God? Yet it was not me; it was not me....”

His speech, usually so direct to the mark, circled and returned about some undefined enormity like a hovering eagle fearful to strike. I don’t know how long it lasted. I didn’t know how time passed. I never once raised my face, but submitted to his words as to a deluge. I had no conception of his meaning. I was in a formless world, with nothing to seize on, nothing to cling to, with no precise image to symbolise for me the secret of its horror. I was enveloped in an atmosphere of reek and fume.

“There were times,” the confession came to me, “when I doubted the saving grace of the Lord. There are times when I still doubt. Because there’s a fear at my heart, boy; a fear ...” —his voice sank to a dreadful whisper—“Every time I sail these waters it’s at the hazard of my soul. For the evil thing there rages for me, like a lion robbed of its prey. And within me too, there’s something not yet purged away; something that stirs

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at the sight of that shore; something that whines to be back there, whines like a sick beast. And in my sleep, it’s like a hand that comes reaching for me—a hand!”

His fingers closed on my arm in a sharp grip.

I sprang up and wrenched myself free.

“It’s horrible! horrible!” I cried.

All about me was the darkness of the cabin, with the Captain's face full in light staring towards me with a wild intensity; and on the table beneath me that spider-like shadow, palpitating, and with legs that moved.

"Ye don't understand," the Captain broke into a violent shout. "I was an upright man. I loved righteousness. It was not me, I tell ye, that did these things. Yet the evil had entered into my living spirit. I had become a corruption. And ye too, boy, ye're innocent; but ye'll learn. And then ye'll come back to me." He repeated in an urgency of insistence, "I say, ye'll come back...."

With his eyes still fixing me he began to rise as though in the intention to seize me. I was conscious of a sickening terror, and I didn't know whether the next moment I should sink back to my chair or rush from the cabin.

But just then the ship's bell started to sound.

We both counted the strokes.

Eight bells! Yet seven bells I had not heard.

"Back to your duty!" the Captain said shortly, and added in his curiously gentle tone, "I'm sorry, lad; I've robbed ye of your sleep."

CHAPTER FIVE

THE NEXT morning the air was blind with fog. It lifted about an hour after sunrise to show the shore at the same remove, and so utterly unchanged that we might have lain hove to all night. I expected that the evening would find me free of the ship, and kept an eye alert for signs of a harbour; but five days passed, and still no break appeared in that monotony of threatening surf and confronting jungle.

Fortunately there was plenty of work, for we were set to breaking out the hold. I had signed on—like the other new hands, I learnt—after the stores had been taken aboard, and had no idea of what they consisted. I might have remained ignorant, because they were uniformly concealed in oil-casks, and looked innocent enough, but Old Sawny was at hand to enlighten me, and Papa as well with his significant winks.

There were vast quantities of food: rice, oatmeal, horse beans, hard tack, salted pork and beef; casks of fresh water too, and some brandy and rum. There was also plentiful merchandise for bartering: knives, cutlasses,

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muskets and powder, pitchers and bowls in copper and pewter, chintzes, cottons and calicoes, a number of looking-glasses, a deal of ornamental trinkets such as necklaces and bracelets, bangles and beads, and a supply of iron bars, copper wire and cowrie shells which constituted, I was told, the currency of the country. There were a few more particular articles—perfumes, a case of razors, a set of chairs and table, a brass cannon—designed as gifts to some potentate. And finally, of more sinister import, there were hand-cuffs, neck-collars, leg-shackles, chains, which confirmed me, if I needed confirmation, in my decision to leave the ship.

We were able to sort these by secret marks on the casks. The liquor, and such provisions as there was space for, we stored in the lazaret; the rest we arranged in the bottom of the hold and laid over them a floor of deal planking, thus forming a false deck which left a between-decks some five feet high. Here and in the cabin we stowed the merchandise ready for carrying ashore.

Meanwhile the look-out was given strict orders to keep a bright watch for any sail. Yet if a cruiser had challenged us we had our bluff ready. There

were a few casks of genuine oil aboard which could be adduced in proof of the lawfulness of our enterprise, and some of this was even burnt in the try-pots to give them their proper fishy smell. And to explain our presence near land, empty water-casks were set handy which needed refilling. But as it happened there was no occasion to

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put the bluff to the test. Once indeed a sail was sighted on our starboard quarter far on the horizon, but it dropped away again before we could distinguish its nature. Except for this single appearance we moved through an empty sea.

We seemed hardly to advance, except when a squall blew up. It may have been the lack of wind which kept us to such a sluggish pace, or it may have been that the Captain was expecting some signal. Certainly as we passed the Rio Pongo he ordered sail to be shortened, and searched the land minutely with his telescope, standing at the rail by the hour motionless but for the slow swing of his glass. But the land remained dumb.

“That’s a closed shop,” I remember Old Sawny grumbling in my ear. “I seed a deal o’ black fish shipped from there in my day, but that’s gorn by. The govermint ships stood in one morning, an’ Froggy lent a hand too, an’ shut it down good an’ all. Yet ’twere a sure market in the time o’ Mongo John. Ormond his name were by rights, but they called him Mongo John. Jus’ a damn black mulatto he were, but he kep’ a rare house. ’Twere as fine a place to berth in as yer’ll find in a thousand mile. Yer could choose yer drink, and yer could choose yer woman. A harem o’ beauties he had up there at Bangalang. All sorts for all tastes: black and white and every colour between; Christian and heathen, Moslem and Jew; fresh young creatures with the juice still in ’em like a ripe orange, an’ withered old huskies worn dry in the service; but he kep’ ’em, he kep’ ’em all. Lived the

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life o’ a king he did; but he rotted away, fair rotted away, an’ at last took an’ put a bullet through his heart. Well, that’s a better end than some on us’ll come to. An’ they gave him a burial, I heard tell, that’d’ve done honour to the Great Cham. A salute o’ guns like wot he were an emperor, an’ a cortidge o’ all the chiefs from a hundred mile around, an’ his wives in rags an’ ashes follering him to the grave all shrieking an’ yelling an’ cutting theirselves with knives an’ lashing theirselves with whips an’

setting their flesh in a sizzle with hot irons. An' a priest too to sing him a-sleep in case his sperrit weren't easy like. An' after, such a gorging o' bullocks an' a swilling o' rum as yer never heard tell. An' ter crown it, a battle o' all the braves with bows an' arrers an' spears an' guns; there were likely more burying afore they'd done. But there, it's the same ole yarn. He'd a been as happy if they'd throwd him to the sharks. But it's the same ole yarn. Live ill or live well, it's the same ole yarn. Trust me, son, it an't the meat as matters, it's the drop as washes it down. An' it don't serve to look too close; not if the taste's to yer fancy. It don't serve, that it don't, swelp me Gawd!"

I believe there was some moral intended in this drifting talk, which culminated in a prolonged grunt. Old Sawny was continually shuffling up to me in these days, reminiscing as the coast recalled old adventures, and slipping in quaint snippets from his philosophy of easy acceptance.

Preparation for receiving the slaves went steadily forward.

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Iron gratings were let into the hatches for the purpose of ventilation, and ring-bolts were fixed at intervals in the deck for shackling the slaves to in the daytime. The bulkhead of the cabin, which breasted the main deck like a wall, was strengthened within with stout timbers and pierced for muskets so as to form a barricade in case of mutiny. All this kept Chips busy, while the cooper was at work making "kids" for serving the food in to the blacks.

There were some fifty or sixty of these kids, and one day Nick and I were set to splicing rope handles to them. We found them arranged in neat rows, and Bungs, a fellow of barrel-like rotundity, standing over them and surveying them with paternal complacency.

"Hallo, Bungs," Nick greeted him, "these your kids?"

"Being funny, ain'cher?" Bungs returned in a rather squeaky voice, good-humouredly on the defensive.

"Been committing adultery with an oil-cask, looks to me," Nick continued. "You're a bad old man."

"Well, might do worse, might do worse," Bungs chuckled.

"All children of the same mother?" Nick asked.

"Yes, but she died, poor dear!" Bungs replied, "and left all these poor little orphans on my hands."

"Oh well," Nick kept up the jest, "I know a dear old tub just about your measure. Fond of a drop, I admit, but if you broach her in the right way..."

It was while Nick and I were occupied with the handles that I noticed the ship's doctor standing before

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me. I don't know his real name to this day. Sawny and a few of the older hands used to call him the Shikko, which I learnt later was a cant slaving term for the surgeon; but most of us called him Plasters.

There was a certain suitability in the title. He had a pale flabby face which never tanned, and a loose mouth which hung rather helplessly open. His body had a boneless appearance, his legs seeming to rub against each other as he walked; and though he was not really deformed yet he always leant his head awry, hunching one shoulder up towards it in the attitude of a man scratching his cheek upon his collar. His hands were constantly a-tremble, so that whether selecting a *cigarillo* or a lancet he fumbled for it in the manner of a child. If he walked beside you he edged himself heavily against you, forcing you from your path. In fact, there was an impression both in his person and in his behaviour of something uncoordinated and out of control; and this was emphasised by the vague stare of his misty grey eyes which appeared permanently set on some featureless infinity. The marvel was that he contrived to administer the correct drugs, let alone mix them or pour out a measure without spilling the half of it over the floor. Yet, with fingers twitching and shaking, he would unerringly lance a tumour or open a vein. In every instance the impression was that he had succeeded by sheer good fortune; but he succeeded. Possibly this was because his mind was so aloof that he failed to notice the unrest of his members; and certainly the physical

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unrest resulted in no mental agitation. It was as though some impersonal agency functioned through his body which unknowingly responded.

He was quite young—he could barely have left his apprenticeship—yet, except for occasional outbursts of almost infantile frolic, his manner showed no symptom of youth. He had no vices, no prejudices, no enthusiasms. He moved about the ship, unhearing, unseeing, wrapt in abstractions like a philosopher. You would find him talking to you in a toneless quiet voice on themes that might have puzzled Plato. I'm inclined to believe that he possessed an intellect of the very first order; the kind of intellect that can reason in a pure void with no need of guiding symbols.

One result of all this was that degrees and distinctions, to us very real, had no meaning for him. He would drift into conversation with Cocky or the Captain with the same air of unconscious equality. But the more obvious result was that his body was left to shift for itself like a neglected child, and I am certain that the slip-shod spectacle it presented could never have caused him a moment's pity or amusement. Yet there was an advantage in this. He looked the type to succumb to sickness at the first roll of the ship; the type too to yield to panic in a gale. We had counted on this in the fo'c'sle, anticipating fun. But he never showed the least sign of either panic or sickness. The gale when it came—except that his body took to plunging unaccountably across the deck, and that he felt an obscure need of holding to ropes and

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stanchions, which expressed itself in a mild perplexity upon his face—might not have existed for him. His spirit, worlds away, remained serenely unperturbed.

I realised that he was talking to me now, beginning his conversation as always as though already deeply engaged.

"The sanction of ethics," he was saying, "is of course more valid than that of economics. But you will agree that even ethics must yield to philosophy. I should like to hear what your philosophical position is in this matter."

His perfectly vacant face, as I looked up at him, showed no trace of human interest or speculation. As an individual he was in no way concerned with the answer to the problem he had posed for me. It would not affect his conduct, nor touch him personally at any point.

I answered rather testily, "Right is right and wrong is wrong," and added, "I don't know if there's any philosophy in that."

"It's a philosophy in itself," he told me in a quiet off-hand manner as though passing on some trifling information. "It posits a dualism. But if life is to be explained monistically it would be better to consider right and wrong provisionally as two attributes of the same substance. Or you might say that wrong is simply the absence of right just as darkness is the absence of light."

"I suppose," I retorted, "that if I hit you on the head

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with this kid that would merely be the absence of not hitting you.”

“You are making the assumption,” he answered in the same measured way, “that to hit me would be wrong. If you really felt an irresistible prompting to hit me it is probable that your action would be in line with some eternal principle. It is well to think of life as having a grain, and the only wrong, philosophically speaking, is to cut across the grain. Ethics has a way of taking into consideration such inessentials as personal happiness. Happiness may or may not lie along the grain. That is why I asked for your position philosophically.”

“I haven’t one,” I told him shortly.

“To see clearly one must see mystically,” he went on, suavely undeterred. “You seem to me to be sub-mystic, and the Captain super-mystic. You are blinded by the actual, he is confused by the visional. Perhaps you have noticed that he suffers from spiritual hallucination. That I can explain quite simply as a physician. He has no wife.”

The anticlimax left me for a moment in a blank stare. But he seemed entirely unconscious that he had crashed to earth from his philosophical sublimities.

“The medieval conception of humours,” he continued, “has unfortunately fallen into disrepute. Yet the body is nothing but a congregation of humours which give off the complicated vapour which is the mind. If the humours are poisoned the mind is obscured. And continence drives back into the body certain ranknesses

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which should be excreted. Or to express it philosophically, continence is a cutting across the grain.”

The amazing thing was that he could deliver this judgment with the aloofness of a mathematician expounding a theorem.

“Does that explain Old Sawny too?” I challenged him.

That did seem to perplex him.

“Is Old Sawny also a visionary?” he asked.

“According to your definition, yes,” I replied. “But I shouldn’t accuse him of continence.”

“No, the old sod!” Nick broke in with a laugh.

“I must talk to Old Sawny,” Plasters said, and gazed sleepily about the deck as though looking for him. He tucked under his arm a little cane he was carrying, which exaggerated the hunching of his shoulder, and with his

head to one side and his feet with difficulty avoiding each other he ambled away.

Bungs, who all this while had been standing with arms akimbo, his round jolly face in a bewildered gape, declared squeakily that he was damned.

“You’re all right, Bungs,” Nick told him. *“You get to work on that old tub I’ve told you about, and you won’t see visions. You’re well in the grain.”*

As for me, I found this cold impersonal analysis of the matter more fantastic than the Captain’s fevered hallucinations.

And all this while the Captain betrayed no recollection of that night’s strange conference, speaking to me only in the ordinary way of command.

CHAPTER SIX

IT WAS on the third morning after we had sighted land that I noticed a light winking from the shore. Almost before I had consciously shaped the thought that this was the expected signal the ship was already swinging to port at the Captain's order, and we were busy trimming the sails to the new course. When near in shore we came round again to our earlier direction, but with shortened sail, so that we made but barely perceptible headway. Meanwhile a flat-bottomed canoe, manned by five blacks, had pushed off from the beach, leaping the tremendous barrier of the breakers like a living thing, and was making towards us. It contained a single passenger who squatted with huddled up knees beneath a sun-shade of palm leaves. He was dressed in a loose white shirt and white trousers, and wore a huge sombrero. When within hailing distance he stood up and saluted us with an animated wave of his hat, showing us his waist wrapped about with a wide scarlet cloth stuck with knives and pistols. As soon as the canoe came alongside he scrambled with the agility of a monkey

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up the ladder we had lowered for him. I had a full view of his face as he came; it confirmed the monkey-like impression of his agility. It was a youngish face, but shrivelled and yellow, the skin about the eyes drawn into innumerable puckers, the mouth a thought prognathous, the lips wide and mobile. On touching deck he made a leap for the poop, exclaiming greetings in Spanish, and with arms wide as though in the intention of embracing the Captain about the neck; but he had to content himself with wringing a single hand extended stiffly towards him at the full stretch of the arm. The next moment we were busy shaking out sail again, and when I was free to look about me we had already drawn well away from shore. There was no sign of the canoe; the Captain and the stranger had disappeared, presumably into the cabin. To all appearance nothing might have happened.

This was a bitter dashing of my hopes. I had made so certain that the moment of my freedom had arrived. But it was soon explained to me that Cristobal—that was the new-comer's name—was only the "barker," or agent, of the factor who supplied Captain Andrew with slaves. He had

come to evaluate the merchandise, and settle the terms of the deal. For with such few ports as there were closed to the slavers, who were thus obliged to embark their cargo from an open shore patrolled by cruisers, bartering was too slow a business to be left till the moment of arrival.

Cristobal was either very conscientious or very suspicious.

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That afternoon and the whole of the next day barely sufficed for him to check the Captain's inventory. Cask after cask had to be hauled up to the light and opened so that he might assure himself of its contents. And my heart sickened at the delay.

It was during this inspection that Nick and I were summoned before the fellow. "These are the two," the Captain introduced us. Cristobal swept off his hat with a flourish, and bowing exaggeratedly exclaimed, "Great honour, great honour! We become famous friends, yes?" He was prepared to run on, but the Captain dismissed us with a curt nod.

"Christ!" Nick remarked, "are they going to put us in a monkey-house?"

Certainly life ashore with Cristobal promised poor attraction.

During these days of waiting the least incident was a relief, even one of Slobbers' sudden rages. One dinner-time, as we received our ladleful of stew, Cocky, always to the fore with complaints, drew out from his mess-tin a particularly nauseating string of fatty gristle. "Lumme!" he cried, displaying it before us, "wot'cher been puttin' in the stoo, Slobbers? Been spittin' in it, ain'cher?"

Slobbers let out a mouthful of filth, and seizing his axe leapt at Cocky. Cocky dropped his dinner and made a single spring for the rat-lines, swarming up them with the speed of terror. As it happened, Slobbers in the blindness of his fury collided with Plasters who was

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wandering the deck in one of his aimless perambulations. Plasters sat down abruptly, while Slobbers, distracted from his first quarry, stood over him, brandishing his axe and screaming: "Who the hell yer knocking inter! Who the hell yer take me for!"

Plasters picked himself up, not in the least discomposed, and regarded Slobbers as though with a slowly awakening consciousness.

"Is that a rhetorical question," he asked in his quiet voice, "or do you really require an answer?"

Slobbers continued to scream, “Who the hell yer take me for!” and swung his axe in a circle within an inch of Plasters’ head.

“Anthropologically speaking,” Plasters replied, as though giving a serious answer to a serious question, “something sub-human. Psychologically speaking—”

This was too much for Slobbers. He grounded his axe with a thud, and thrust his face into the face of Plasters, staring with a ferocious perplexity. The two faces remained so for a minute in ludicrous juxtaposition, the one quivering and distorted and flushed to a violent scarlet, the other vacantly placid and with the pallour of dough; then Slobbers broke into a screaming laughter, and with one hand pointing at Plasters and the other holding his side he staggered back to the galley, where he collapsed on to a bench and with hysterical jabberings attempted to impart to us the mystery of his merriment.

A little later Cocky came creeping down from his

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perch, obviously prepared at the first threat of danger to scramble up again. “Fawver!” he complained, as reassured at length he rejoined us, “and nah I ain’t got no grub!”

“*Ach was!*” Fritz exclaimed, handing him the remainder of his own portion, “dat’s never mind! Only you can eat dis. I find it not good for me here.”

He laid a hand on his stomach, while Cocky, accepting the charity as though by right, hungrily set to, telling us between mouthfuls how he would have dealt with Slobbers if he had ventured after him up the mast. This occasioned some very obvious chaff, culminating in a shout from Nick, “Mind out, Cocky, he’s coming!” which cut him short in his bragging and sent him leaping incontinently for safety.

Towards evening we bore away from land, and at length found ourselves in the open sea. “Giving a wide berth to Sarey Loney,” Old Sawny explained the manœuvre; “ ‘tan’t a healthy place these times.” He rambled on in the manner he had adopted lately, concealing vague hints in a monologue of grunting reminiscence. “If ye’re thinking of setting up a black menagerie yer must choose a spot where a ship can’t swim in,” he told me. “And there’s a deal o’ such, yer’ll find. Mud and mangrove swamps, that’s wot this coast is mostly. And that’s wot keeps the trade alive; that an’ the surf. They can’t foller. An’ ter keep a lookout for fifteen

hundred mile may be, that asks for more eyes than they got heads for. But 'tan't wot it used to be now they've shut up

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Whyder an' the Bonny an' Old Calabar. Yer never knows when a sail may haul up over the sky-line. It's a nasty foul hide-in-the-hole sort o' game; a grab-an'-run sort o' game. But they can't put an end to it, all the same. They an't smoked out ole Pedro Blanco from Gallinas yet; an' there's a deal more beside. 'Cos why? The land's agin 'em. Foul an' nasty it may be, but the land's agin 'em. An' the people too. Trust me, son, the land an' the people, they're both in a compact; a devil's compact, if yer will, but both mighty strong on the side o' the trade. The land an' the people; and that's the holy truth, swelp me Gawd!—But there, don'cher mind me."

However, the tedious waiting ended at last. It was announced by a slender column of smoke rising from a point in the jungle.

"There she blows, Joey!" I heard Pips' bantering drawl.

Papa, hurrying past me with a white flag over his arm, contrived to squeeze his eye down at me in a prodigious wink and whisper harshly, "You'll see things now, son." He bent the flag to the signal halyard and ran it up to the fore truck.

Once again all was bustle bringing the ship in shore, where some hundreds of negroes were filing out of the jungle and ranging up in readiness. We drew dangerously near the breakers, it seemed to me, before the sails were hauled up and the anchor dropped.

Then it was all hands loading the merchandise into

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the boats and discharging it again on to the surf canoes which put out to meet us, and which alone could cross the breakers. Meanwhile the Captain, with Monsieur Louis, Plasters and Cristobal, went ashore, the Captain and Plasters to inspect the slaves before embarking them, and Louis to take charge of operations on the beach. The cargo disposed of, the slaves were sent aboard. This was a more hazardous process, as in changing from the canoes to the boats the slaves were inclined, in their panic, to swarm over the gunwale in a single body. We stood by with paddles raised, forcing them to order by clubbing the obstreperous over the head. In this way they were tumbled in—shaven, branded, naked wretches—and lay shaking where they had fallen, more like fish than human beings. They were

received on board by Oslo and a few of the more stalwart hands. The men were thrust unceremoniously down the hatchways, and the women and children bundled into the cabin, while Dusty, a loaded pistol in either hand, stood by the cabin door on guard over an open armchest where weapons lay ready in case of need.

That much I saw and took a part in. Then I was summoned before the Captain, who had returned to the ship.

“This is where ye step ashore,” he told me. “Ye’ll find Cristobal there to take charge o’ ye. And I’m not sending ye empty-handed. Ye can take your choice of muskets and suchlike. Don’t stint yourself; ye’ll need all ye can get in the place ye’re going to. And I’m not asking for your word not to blab; I can trust ye there.

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So good-bye, Joey, and good luck to ye! But it’s only for a little. Ye’ll come back.”

He gave me his hand.

He seemed to have forgotten Nick. I thought it unnecessary to remind him. Somehow the interview was too painful to prolong. It was all I could do to keep my voice steady enough to say “Good-bye, sir.” I saluted, and turned away.

Nick considered that the order applied to him as well as to me, particularly the injunction not to go empty-handed. We chose a musket apiece from Dusty’s arm-chest, a brace of pistols and cutlasses, and some balls and powder. Then dumping these and our seachests in the last boat we took a hasty farewell of our mates and clambered down the ladder. I noticed then how complete had been the Captain’s bluff. The boat was provided with its harpoons and its drum of twine as though in readiness for its proper task.

It was not till I found myself in the canoe that I realised the full danger of that thundering surf. The boys hung on their paddles for a moment waiting for a smooth, then driving furiously forward sent the shallow craft leaping on to the breakers to be swept at a racing slide up the beach.

Cristobal was awaiting us there. He seized us each by a hand and drew us through the last of the foam.

“Welcome!” he cried, and before we could prevent him he had kissed us effusively on the cheeks.

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Then suddenly he emitted a soft whistle, and pointed out to sea. A sail had appeared over the horizon.

They seemed to have seen it on board too, for the returning boat was hurriedly drawn up, the anchor weighed, sail shaken out, yards trimmed, and in a very few minutes the *Jehovah* had headed round with the wind on her starboard quarter, steering gently away from the shore.

“Not catchee, I think,” Cristobal declared. “So come, we drink a good health, yes?”

We turned and followed him by a path that opened like a tunnel into the jungle, preceded by a party of negroes who were trundling before them the last of the casks.

It was natural that I should glance back before the gloom enclosed me. As I did so a more tremendous sea came crashing in, flinging up the beach splintered wood and corpses. I seemed to remember having seen a canoe capsized; but it had caused no comment.

PART TWO

CHAPTER SEVEN

IT IS no part of my intention to give you a detailed account of life in a Slave Coast factory. Others with a longer and more intimate acquaintance than myself have already put their experiences faithfully on record. But certain events were of importance, and to appreciate these you must see them against their particular background.

Molumbo was the name of our station. It lay on the delta of a muddy river, I discovered, which opened sluggishly into the sea some half a mile along the coast. The bar was impassable to shipping, being more furiously in a rage of breakers than the beach where we had landed. Altogether it was an ugly place. Low marshy islands, matted with mangrove, heaved themselves dripping from an opaque and discoloured water where crocodiles fringed the margins, half submerged, and with snouts stretched up the sodden sand. And all

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around was the jungle, an inextricable tangle of clinging growths, rankly and inveterately green.

About a mile inland the river distended itself into a shallow lake with a single island in the centre. This had been cleared, and stockaded with a rampart of stout sharp cane, to form the barracoon. There was a guard-house at the gate, and a narrow path encircling the wall, patrolled by native guards with muskets. But there was rarely a sentinel on duty, and the patrols slept openly on their rounds. Nothing was said; the crocodiles were a sufficient guarantee against escape.

Our own quarters were on the crest of what seemed in the surrounding flatness a considerable rise. It overlooked the barracoon, and topped the ocean of jungle. Sea-breezes reached us, an incalculable boon; for even twenty feet below us the air sweated and reeked, choking the lungs, and nauseating the throat and palate with the taste of fever. But the mosquitoes reached us too, so that for the first few months, until we became immune to their poison, our faces were swelled out of all recognition and our whole bodies in a fury of intolerable irritation.

Don Ramos, the factor, was a man of some sixty years. He had come to the country as a boy of fifteen and had not left it since. He must have been

a man of a certain force and authority in his time, but buried in such a land and engaged in such a trade, cut off moreover from his own kind, he was now physically and morally a decay. Unkempt, obese, he would loll for

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hours together on his veranda, his arms lying limply along the arms of his cane chair, his open mouth emitting a throaty breathing, his watery eyes fixed on vacancy. From this apathy he might suddenly arise in a paroxysm of rage, call for his servants, scold them for some imaginary neglect, and order indiscriminate floggings; or he might send for his women to come and dance for him, and the dance over select one to be sent to his bed-chamber where he would follow with the uneasy shuffle of a walrus on land. Yet in his cups he was kindly enough, dipping into a store of reminiscences, and becoming increasingly lachrymose till his head would fall upon the table and he would sob himself to sleep.

The business of the place was in the hands of Cristobal. Little that I liked him, and less that I trusted him, I yet admired his energy, unsubdued by the torpor of that crushing atmosphere. Don Ramos was taking his repose in his old age, he told us, and new blood was necessary to keep the factory alive. This was on the evening of our arrival, when Don Ramos, after first welcoming us with a certain hospitable dignity to Molumbo, had eventually taken to commiserating us on being cast on such an accursed shore, till slipping into a maudlin self-pity he had finally collapsed across the table. Cristobal, who had interpreted his unintelligible Spanish in a whimsical running commentary, made no effort to have him moved. He simply called for more wine, promising us choicer brands than the Don had

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accorded us, and fell to expounding his plan of campaign in a manner of such friendly frankness that we might have been, as he continually insisted, blood brothers. I began to wonder into what I had been inveigled. Something in the incongruous unfamiliarity of the place sapped at my resolution. We were sitting in a vast low-ceilinged chamber lit with hanging oil-lamps. Our table, set central, was of massive mahogany. It was laid with a cloth of intricate Indian design, but soiled with spillings. Dilapidated wicker chairs were scattered here and there, hung with antimacassars of rich lace and provided with costly cushions. At one end of the room was a billiard table, at the other a piano. A vast Persian carpet covered the floor,

and silk curtains were drawn across the windows. Besides all this there were pictures, porcelains, bric-a-brac of every description, which must have cost a fortune in amassing; yet the effect was not of splendour, but of a pathetic and tawdry confusion. And in the midst of it Don Ramos sprawled in a drunken slumber, his mouth slobbering a little, his shoulders heaving occasionally to some spasmodic convulsion. I could feel too the presence of the night outside, utterly without a sound, and under the night lay thousands of miles of jungle, thousands of miles of ocean, shutting me away from the cleanness and sanity of my own land. All this gave a dark significance to Cristobal's chatter, so that in my fear at being taken in a snare I suddenly broke into his talk, reminding him that I had left the *Jehovah* because I refused to associate myself with slaving,

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and declaring with a somewhat hysterical insistence that my determination held on land as well as at sea. This set him in a bright laughter, and he reached towards me as though to embrace me, exclaiming his delight in my nobility of nature, and promising that I should not soil so much as my little finger nail in the dirty business. There was abundance of legitimate trade, he assured me, slaves being only one commodity among many, and my work would be to take charge of this legitimate trade. Nick, on the other hand, who Cristobal, either by his native shrewdness or on the Captain's information, realised did not share my objections, was to understudy his own duties, tapping the hinterland for slaves and bargaining with the traders, so that he himself would be free to remain at Molumbo and reorganise the factory which Don Ramos—he nodded his head meaningly at the collapsed figure—was allowing to rot. Clearly the plan pleased him immensely. He clapped his hands, snapped his fingers, and clicked his tongue, declaring that it was a triumph; and over-brimming our glasses he insisted on a final toast to the prosperity of the enterprise. Perhaps the wine had gone to my head, perhaps I was tormented simply by the stabbing mosquitoes; but I dashed my glass to the floor and shouted that it was all lies and that I would have no part in it. For a moment the monkey face, shrivelled, puckered and prognathous, flushed with a dangerous anger; but immediately the wide lips were all smiles again. “You are tired, *hermano mio*,” he said; “you must

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sleep.” I don’t know what I was about to break out with in reply, but a servant appeared from somewhere with a lantern and led me away to my apartment, while Cristobal’s gay “*Buena noche!*” rang insolently in my ears.

I understood its insolence as soon as I reached my room, for a mulatto girl rose from the bed and greeted me with a deep salutation. I was just conscious of her insinuating smile, of her calculated semi-nudity, but I was too angry to feel temptation. I shouted her away. As it happened she stayed through the night, but I knew nothing of that till the morning, because I flung myself on my bed and was immediately asleep.

With regard to the legitimate business of the place, Cristobal had spoken the truth, though in my sulkiness and distrust I was difficult to convince. However, within a few days I found myself in charge of considerable stores of gold dust, ivory, bees’-wax, skins, rice, honey, and other inland commodities, as well as several pens of cattle; and for exchange, a certain supply of muskets and powder, rum and tobacco, and a quantity of cheap cottons and ornaments such as had been unloaded from the *Jehovah*.

It was not long before a caravan arrived from the depths of the jungle, announced from afar by a great beating of tomtoms, blowing of horns, and discharging of muskets, and headed by a ponderous fat chieftain borne on a hammock amid a body-guard of ferociously

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painted braves. After a grand palaver goods were displayed as though at an immense fair, and bartering began. Cristobal saw to my initiation, keeping me in his wake, and throwing me shrewd asides in explanation of the bewildering process. Something in it caught at my interest, and from that day I took to my duties with a zest. I studied up the rates of exchange as reckoned in cowries, iron bars and brass wire, so that I might have a working rule for the equivalent values of my wares; applied myself to the mastering of Spanish, without which I could find no interpreter at Molumbo; and set to arranging my stores to suit my own rather fastidious demands, and to putting my accounts in order. All this gave me a very considerable satisfaction; but I don’t wish to emphasise it because, being apart from the business of slaving, it is really out of the course of my story. Yet there is a connection; because when I began to wrestle seriously with

my accounts I found myself in conflict with Angelina, and in a way she decided my fate.

Angelina was the chief wife of Don Ramos. There may have been a time when her name was not altogether a travesty, but she was now a withered old hag, indescribably ugly, not so much with age as with wickedness. There must have been a large measure of Arab blood in her, for her features were not those of the negro. She had the hooked nose and the lank white hair of a witch in a picture book, and her chin had put forth a sparse tangled growth of beard. Angular and deformed,

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she could yet hobble with a jerky rapidity that was astonishing, making good a slanting crablike progress with a couple of stout sticks which gave to her doubled-up body the appearance of a four-legged creature. And she had a voice like the screech of a parrot, so persistent and so penetrating that it was to be heard from some corner of the settlement at all hours of the day. Yet she continued to rule that wrecked old man as though still in the pride of her beauty, for Don Ramos, though he would not hesitate at ordering an unfaithful concubine to be flogged to death, could not free himself of her tyranny. She would scold him for his neglect of her, and to force her charms upon him would strip herself naked and dance before him in actions of such grotesque lasciviousness that the gorge rose at it. In his tearful moods he would complain bitterly that he was compelled to waste the waning dregs of his manhood on that creature of bones and odours when he had at his disposal the prime pick of the continent. But her dealings with me were not of that order. It was simply that she had long established her right to rifle the stores, not merely of cottons and trinkets to decorate her person, but of knives and muskets by which to bribe the servants, and even the surrounding chieftains, into her power. Foolishly I tried to put a stop to this, and so made an enemy of her forever.

It nearly cost me my life. When I found myself sickening I thought simply I was succumbing to fever, not suspecting the truth of my illness until Rita put me on

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my guard. Rita was the mulatto girl whom I had found in my room on the night of my arrival. I had found her there every succeeding night, and though there was a constraining seduction in her dark eyes and the

voluptuous softness of her body yet I had summoned resolution to dismiss her each time. When she came to me one evening, however, as I lay on my bed wretchedly dizzy, and with swimming eyes and cajoling fingers appealed to me to have a care for my life as Angelina was slowly poisoning me, my will gave way before her. I threw my arms around her and rested my head on her breast, and fell to sobbing; for she had caught me at a low ebb, prostrated in body and bitterly lonely in mind, and I yielded to her less as a lover than as a child. And indeed for a few days, while I kept to my room, she was all mother to me, nursing me and attending herself to my food; and my rapid recovery was proof enough that her accusation had been true. After this I had not the fortitude to drive her away. I squared the matter with my conscience by telling myself that I loved the girl, as indeed I did, and that I considered her my lawful wife, vowing to heaven that if I left the country she should accompany me. But how much the devil had to do with that compromise I cannot rightly estimate to this day. Still, what with my love and my growing interest in my duties, if it had not been for that dark traffic which obtruded itself upon the attention at every turn, and the horror implicit in that evil land, no lot could have been

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pleasanter for a fellow who found his meat in hard work and his wine in adventure.

My marriage, as I chose to think of it, sweetened my relations with Nick. I had behaved abominably up to that time, playing the unmitigated prig; “strutting on stilts,” he himself called it. I scolded him for his prompt acceptance of a couple of concubines, at which he laughingly declared that he was only keeping his promise. I rated him more severely at not standing out boldly against the slaving, to which he retorted with greater heat that I had myself assured him that he had no scruples. This led to a violent quarrel, both of us being at that time out of all humour owing to the plaguing of the mosquitoes and the oppression of the atmosphere, so that for some days we would pass each other without speaking. But when it became definitely known that I had accepted Rita, Nick congratulated me with his customary gay slap on the shoulder, declaring that I should feel much better now that I was “in the grain”; and that evening we made merry on the Don’s choicest wines. With Cristobal to clap on the mirth, the carousal became intemperate, so that when Nick shook a finger at me and

said, "What would your mother say if she could see you now?" the jest seemed to me screamingly funny and I laughed inordinately. I was rather ashamed of myself the next morning, because somehow the memory came to me of Captain Andrew's words: "Ye're a good earnest lad, Joey; ye might stand conscience to a

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man, if need were." In my few short weeks at Molumbo I seemed to have succumbed very easily and very rapidly to the demoralisation of the country.

I kept myself as aloof as possible from the slaving, but as Nick and Cristobal would talk their affairs before me in the evenings I knew well what was going on. Nick frequently pressed me to visit the barracoon with him. "All ship-shape," he told me it was, "and with every safe-guard for the preservation of chastity." I was prepared to believe him, for good health and virginity enhanced the value of that merchandise. So I would retort, and decline his invitations. And after all, what would there have been to see? Some hundreds of blacks in a great enclosure awaiting in various attitudes of depression the hour when they would be shipped to a strange land. Yet efforts were made to keep them amused. One heard tomtoms beating and the sounds of dancing; and particularly on the evening before a ship was due they were treated to a great feast of rice with a measure of rum, and the subsequent clamour that emanated from behind that palisade of canes, lasting into the early morning, was so bestial in its shrill abandon that it was impossible to believe it to be the mere hilarity of men. But there was no kindness behind all this. Jollity was as essential to health as meat and drink, for a moping nigger is very soon a corpse. Moreover, as the slaves filed to the beach after their night of revelry the merriment had quite gone, their limp arms and drooping heads expressing an utter dejection. When I asked Nick,

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not in indignation now but in pity, how he could put his hand to such work, he had his answer pat. They were prisoners of war, these people, and slavery in the Indies would be paradise to what they might expect from their own countrymen. Well, Nick had travelled up country with Cristobal, and he had seen things which even to hear recounted made one's hair bristle. But this talk of humanity was a sham. It did not explain the

doctoring of the sick so that they would pass the rapid scrutiny of the ship's surgeon; those with the flux, for instance, being plugged to conceal the discharge, only to perish in agony after a few days at sea. Nor did it explain the disposal of rejected unfits, who were knocked on the head and tossed to the crocodiles. But to quarrel with Nick was to make life miserable—particularly as the rains now set in, an inconceivable deluge which during some three or four months would imprison us in each other's company for days together—so after a while I held my tongue and let things pass.

The rains over, there came times when Nick and Cristobal were both away, Nick slave-collecting among the neighbouring chieftains, and Cristobal up the coast on the look-out for passing ships. My evenings were then spent tête-à-tête with Don Ramos. He seemed to have taken to me in a fatherly sort of way, merely, I believe, because his name was also *José*, and I was his *tocayo*, his namesake. He would sentimentalise over me, laying a flabby hand on mine, fixing me with tearful eyes; and heaving a deep sigh he would say, “Ah, *hijo mio*, you

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shall inherit when I am gone; and you will be rich, very rich.” At this point of his talk he would enlarge on the greatness of his work, trying to draw promises from me that I would continue his labours, not simply pocket the gold and sail away; but as the night lengthened his manner changed, and he fell to pitying me on my evil case, though he became increasingly unintelligible as he slipped into some patois I couldn't understand. “*Fill meu, fill meu!*” the cry would come to me. “*Pobret, pobret!*” Once indeed he led me with great secrecy to a locked chamber where he unsealed a huge coffer, and dipping his hands in drew out brimming piles of coins in every conceivable currency. ‘All this have I gathered,’ he exclaimed. “*Redeu*, but once I was a man!” He made gestures as though offering it to me, and bidding me begone; but his weakness came upon him, and it was all I could do to drag him from the chamber and lock the door, where I left him in the hands of his servants who had come at my summons. For a night or two after this I thought he eyed me suspiciously as one to whom he had betrayed too much. But his old manner returned. I was once more his son who was to inherit and build up the factory to greatness again as it had been, *recristo!* in the days of his vigour.

I paid little heed to all this. I didn't even ask what part he was allotting to Cristobal in the arrangement, though I was uneasy lest the stupid talk

should come to Cristobal's ears, guessing well how he would interpret it. I was more interested in the Don's long rambling

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yarns. I could fill a volume with them, pointless as they were, but they are no part of my story. He did enlighten me a little, however, on the mystery of Captain Andrew. I gathered that for a time the Captain had lived among the negroes, possibly as a missionary, possibly as a captive, I was never quite certain; but the essential was that he had become a power among the natives, a sort of priest-king, the impression seemed to be, till at length revolting from such a life he had escaped. There must have been an epic attached to that too, for he was hunted for months in the jungle, and appeared at last at Molumbo emaciated and half mad from his frightful experiences. Even so his pursuers did not give up the chase. For weeks the jungle throbbed with drums, till Don Ramos gathered the chiefs together and promising them generous payment sent them out with their warriors to clear away the pest. Captain Andrew stayed on for a year, slowly recovering his strength and sanity. At first his outcries were terrible, calling through the night for vengeance; but towards the end he became curiously quiet, and when he left he promised Don Ramos that he would return, adding in a strange way that God had a work for him. And he kept his word, the Don told me, returning year after year to that same country where he had ruled, raiding it for slaves.

This rather puzzled me, for the Captain had taken his slaves from Molumbo. I expressed my doubt to Don Ramos, who merely said, "He will have space."

This information shook me considerably. I had

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thought of the *Jehovah* as already well on her way to the West, but it was possible that she was still cruising off the coast while the Captain was engaged in the interior on some expedition of vengeance. I understood now the significance of that iterated declaration: "My word will be the voice of God to you, afloat or ashore!" His business was not confined to the sea. Yet the perturbing thing was to feel that he might be still at hand, for somehow this lent emphasis to his insistence that I would come back to him.

I asked Don Ramos where this country lay which Captain Andrew visited so persistently with his revenge. He waved vaguely in no particular

direction, and muttered a name that I could make nothing of. The truth was that the yarn was matter to recount of an evening; no more. To the drama that underlay the Captain's infatuation he was utterly insensible. For life had taught him nothing; and easily touched as he was to angers and complaints, yet the immense conflict of Good and Evil, which set the Captain's spirit in a ferment, could not move him to the least agitation. Indeed, though these two men were both victims in a measure of that ugly land, there was really no likeness between them. Don Ramos had yielded as to a slow disease, but the Captain had declared war as upon an enemy. The one was no more than a water-logged derelict, but the other, even if the storm took him, would go down, I felt, like some splendid vessel, with the master at the helm and flag flying.

CHAPTER EIGHT

I DON'T wish to enlarge on my relations with Rita; these were so entirely personal. Her manner to me was adorably feminine, which seems an adequate statement of the case. Yet she was something more than a companion; she was also an intelligence department and a body-guard. As a body-guard, I trusted her completely to outwit any further essays of Angelina upon my life; but as an intelligence department, I was never able to accord her such entire confidence. I knew well enough she was in touch with all the gossip of the place, for gossip was not merely her only recreation, it was her only occupation; but the reports she was continually bringing to me of plots and counterplots, ranging from mean revenges upon kitchen-boys to frightful mutinies against Don Ramos himself, smacked so blatantly of the chatter of the harem that I paid scant attention to them. I felt the Don had an even surer shield in Angelina than I had in Rita, so I feared little for him. Nick was everybody's friend. And as for Cristobal, if he could not shift for himself I was not greatly concerned to

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come to his aid. As a matter of fact he must have been far better primed than I could be, and I felt there was more to fear from him than against him.

Yet once I did act on Rita's information, and as it happened with happy results to myself. Among the Don's servants there was a certain M'bwala, a particularly fine type of negro, magnificently moulded, and with a face of such patent and childlike honesty that one instinctively warmed to him. When Rita told me that he had been accused to the Don of theft, and was to be flogged, I was instantly ready to believe her story that it was a put up case of the other servants to have him set aside because he interfered with their own pilfering. I seized a pistol in either hand and ran out to the scene of execution. M'bwala, slung by the wrists to the branch of a tree and with toes just touching the ground, had already received a couple of lashes, when I appeared shouting on the executioner to stop. In the moment's surprise that followed I cut M'bwala down and sent him scampering. Then I turned to face the anger of the Don. I could see by the fury of his brow that he was in the mood to have me flogged in M'bwala's place, and it seemed that to meet his rage I must forestall it with a greater. I cursed him

roundly for a blind fool, declaring that he was sacrificing his one faithful servant to satisfy the jealousy of a pack of rogues, and finished by vowing in the name of all the saints that unless he instantly promised M'bwala's acquittal I would shoot him where he stood and then shoot myself. I continued to rant till

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I could see the fight had gone out of him, then presenting a pistol at his heart and holding the other to my temple I called on him to make his decision. He opened his hands in a gesture of surrender. "As you wish, my son," he said; "you are probably right. I am an old fool, and I cannot see clearly, and everybody cheats me. Everybody cheats this old fool." Then turning suddenly upon the group about him he was taken in another access of rage. "Rogues, villains, infidels!" I heard him begin; but I left him to it. I believe other floggings followed; but further intervention would have been unwise. And the upshot of it was that M'bwala was attached to my household and served me with the devotion of a dog.

There was one theme on which Rita was so annoyingly insistent that at last I forbade her to speak of it again. She would have it that Nick and Cristobal were in league against me and were working up a conspiracy to have me ejected. I was so much in the Don's favour, she said, that they were envious; and besides, she added, caressing me with her fingers, I was so good, I wanted to free all the slaves, and it was believed that I was actually planning to do so, which made them both angry and afraid. If I didn't look to it, she told me again and again, I should find myself cast out of Molumbo.

"Then I will return to my own land," I answered her. "And you will come with me, Rita, and we will live more happily than here."

At that she laughed rather sardonically.

"Yes, you are good," she said; "you are too good."

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You are like a child. But, *pequeño*, they will not send you to your own land; they will drive you into the jungle. And that will not be so happy."

"But, Rita," I argued, "Nick is my friend whom I trust like my right hand; and Cristobal finds me very useful."

It was in vain; she held to her belief. But it was such fantastic nonsense that I refused to listen.

Yet if Nick had been of another pattern there might have seemed a basis for the suspicion. He and Cristobal, in spite of his repeatedly declared aversion, hit it off remarkably well together. Moreover, they certainly had secret matters to discuss of which I was not made a sharer; and there came a time when for a few days Nick appeared deliberately to avoid me, and even eyed me askance, as though his mind were uneasy on some account. But intrigue was so utterly abhorrent to me that I refused to reckon with it as an inevitable condition of life. There was plenty of work to be done, and that demanded my full energies. I knew to I was doing it well, and fortified myself in the knowledge, trusting that Cristobal would be shrewd enough to penetrate my motives, and so, satisfied that I was ordering my department efficiently, would leave me in peace.

I was partly justified; for when Nick, returning from one of his journeys, announced to me that he was getting married, I understood his earlier preoccupation. "Holy matrimony this time!" he declared gaily. "Bosom of the family, sanctity of the hearth, kids, and all that!"

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And what's more, a royal princess, old boy! So don't pull such a damned face, but congratulate a fellow, can't you?"

I soon gathered the facts of the case. It was a political move on the part of Cristobal, and Nick had fallen in line. He was to marry the daughter of a certain Bulobu, a powerful Mandingo chieftain who dominated the region from which the factory drew the better part of its slaves. The chieftain had been growing restive, I was told, demanding extortionate prices, refusing to trade, but the honour of such a marriage would bring him to reason again and bind him in alliance forever. Moreover, as the country was becoming exhausted from the continual depredations, he would be willing to push his raiding farther afield and so tap fresh sources of wealth.

"All very diplomatic!" I commented, when Nick had explained the significance of the transaction. "But why couldn't you let Cristobal do his own marrying?"

"Damn it!" Nick broke out. "Do you think I consented before I saw the girl? And when I saw her—well, ever heard of the Sable Venus? That's not a legend, old boy. And a royal princess too! You must admit that's something to write home about!"

The wedding took place a few weeks later. It was conducted in full accordance with the native etiquette. Presents were first sent to the bride's

people: fire-arms and rum for Bulobu himself, a virgin slave dressed in white, a length of white cotton, a white sheep, and a measure of rice for his wife, and for the bride, a looking-glass,

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a decanter of oil, and a profusion of trinkets. When these were duly accepted, a messenger was dispatched to the groom to announce that the fetich had been consulted, a propitious day chosen for the celebration, and that the bridal party was already on its way. It arrived to the usual discharge of muskets and beating of tom-toms, and was received with a salvo of guns. A path of mats had been laid up the slope that led to the Don's veranda, where Nick, with the rest of us in support, awaited the coming of his bride, with the entire complement of servants and women, together with a mass of local spectators, crowding at the railing. The bride, swathed in white cotton, was carried up on a litter, deposited at the feet of the groom, and unveiled. As nothing was left to her but a scant loin-cloth I was able to understand something of Nick's infatuation, and the admiring cry that went up from the assembled blacks declared at least an enthusiastic native approval. She was indeed a beautiful creature, slenderly formed, with a skin of ivory smoothness, a perfect white line of teeth, deep black eyes, and features surprisingly delicate. In that country one could ask for nothing more. I turned to Nick impulsively and said, "I wish you joy, old man!" and we gripped hands.

The bride was then hailed away to be bathed and anointed, and that completed was carried to Nick's apartment and laid upon his bed. A messenger then presented himself before Nick, handed him the bridal dress, and bowing announced that he might now take

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possession of his bride. It was still early afternoon, and the Don and Cristobal laughed uproariously. But Nick's perky swagger was proof against embarrassment. Hitching jauntily at his dapper white trousers, and setting his vast sombrero at a rakish angle, he damned us all for our jealousy, and with a few terse vulgarities tossed at us over his shoulder strode away to his room. But as soon as he had entered, the place was surrounded by a clamouring swarm of blacks, who whooped, yelled, let off crackers, beat drums, and for the rest of that day and throughout the night maintained such an inconceivable din that when Nick emerged the next

morning he looked as though he had just risen from a bout of malaria. For the rest, the merry-making continued for three days; vast quantities of rum were consumed, not to mention bullocks and sheep, a number of women were violently ravished, there were innumerable quarrels and a few deaths. But for the time at least Nick seemed very happy with his bride, and a political alliance, necessary to the future prosperity of the factory, had been firmly sealed.

Some weeks later Nick set out on a return visit to Bulobu, taking his wife with him. Two days after he had started, Cristobal told me that he must go up the coast as he was expecting a ship, and added that if anything happened in his absence I must immediately light the alarm beacon to recall him. This surprised me. We had a well-developed system of smoke signals so that we could communicate rapidly over a vast space of country; but the alarm beacon was a great pile of carefully

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dried wood, not easily obtainable in such a land, calculated to send a column of flame a hundred feet or more into the air, and supposed to be reserved in case of some acute emergency. I couldn't understand why Cristobal should anticipate the need of it. Troubled in spite of myself by Rita's talk of conspiracy I felt a sudden surge of suspicion, but at the same instant I was on my guard and received the order as though it was of no particular moment. Yet it disturbed me more than I cared to confess, and I set to wondering what possible conjuncture could demand Cristobal's return. But I could make nothing of it.

That night I found Rita strangely agitated. She threw herself into my arms in an access of affection, then drew back with a deep sigh; then once again embracing me with fervour declared, "Ah little one, how I love you, how I love you!" but the next moment she withdrew herself once more with her hands pressed against her temples. When I made advances in my turn she shook herself free of me, and yielded at length only with a sulky reluctance. We spent a wretched night, tossing and turning between fitful bouts of sleep. In the morning Rita was unchanged. I could endure it no longer, and asked her what the matter was that she should behave so.

I was already dressed, and was standing beside the bed where she still lay in a moody huddle. But at my question she abruptly sat up and faced me with a fierceness I had never before seen in her.

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“You have forbidden me to speak,” she answered.

“Well, speak now,” I told her.

At once she was all affection, stroking my hands and gazing ardently up into my face.

“I am so frightened for you, little one,” she said. “But if you will listen to me there may still be time. Only you must act; you must act immediately.”

It was the same old story; but it seemed better to hear her to an end.

“What must I do?” I asked.

“You must kill Don Ramos,” she said.

I would have laughed as one does to divert a child from some foolish whim, but for a purposeful glitter in her eyes which warned me that she was speaking from the heart.

I took her by the shoulders and shook her. “This is wicked talk,” I said; “and you know me better than to say such things.”

I was turning away in my annoyance, but she seized me by the wrist and cried frantically, “You must listen! You must listen!”

Her grip was like a vice, and I could not have freed myself without physical violence. Moreover there was such a wild determination in her face that I felt she would pursue me from end to end of the settlement if need were, but she would make me hear.

“Well then,” I said, “be quick; I have no time to waste on nonsense.”

She slipped to my feet, clasping her arms round my

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knees, her face raised to mine, savage, appealing, the expression shifting rapidly to her changing emotions, while she poured out a torrential story impossible to withstand. The gist of it was that Cristobal’s journey was a sham. He had planned for Don Ramos to be murdered in his absence, and as soon as he received the signal that the murder was done he would rush in and seize the factory. It was Lola who was to poison him.—Who was Lola?—The *favorita* of Cristobal. Angelina would be accused and punished, and Lola would then be supreme. But if I acted quickly, if I killed the Mongo myself, I could seize the factory for my own; and as for Cristobal, I could set M’bwala to follow him, and no one need hear of him again. Then all would be mine. I could do what I wished. I could even free the slaves, she suggested subtly. “Ah, *pequeño*,” she pleaded, “have you not the courage. Then let me do it. It is such a little thing. For in any event that old man

must die. Perhaps he is already dead. And for such a stake! You will be a king!”

“And you, my beauty,” the unspoken comment buzzed harshly in my head, “will be a queen!”

And this was Rita, whom I had loved, but whom now I found hateful beyond all telling!

I unclasped her hands and flung her across the room.

“You are a devil!” I cried. “A devil!”

She sprang to her feet, her face livid with a fury that was terrifying.

“And you,” she screamed at me in return, “are a

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coward! You have the heart of a sick slave! But listen to this: I go now to the Mongo to tell him of your schemings, and he will believe me, and he will kill you! But first you shall be flogged, flogged for all to see! And then you shall be thrown to the crocodiles! That is my faithful promise to you. And I—Don Ramos will take me for his wife.—Ah, miserable bastard of a slave!”

She leapt through the doorway, and I made no effort to stop her, but sat down on the bed feeling sick to the soul. I believed at that moment that Cristobal was as innocent as myself, and that the conspiracy against the Don was a mere ferment of female jealousy, the women intriguing against one another as in a harem. As for Lola, I knew nothing of her. Cristobal seemed so promiscuous in his loves that I had never suspected him of having a *favorita*.—Then I sprang to my feet and called for M’bwala, forgetting the precariousness of my own position in the sudden realisation that the Don was in danger.

The faithful fellow appeared on the instant.

I thrust one of my pistols into his hand, and cried, “Quick, they are killing the Mongo! We must save him!”

With M’bwala at heel I ran for the Don’s apartments. As I reached the veranda a sharp wail rang out from the great chamber, followed by an instant clamour as of wild beasts in battle. I rushed into the room. For a moment I could make out nothing for women and

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servants knotted into a shrieking and gesticulating tangle. I shouted for silence. The yelling ceased abruptly, and the group opened a little. Then I

could see two things: almost at my feet was Angelina, her skinny limbs entwined like cords about the body of a girl, her teeth in the girl's throat, and at a little remove Don Ramos writhing upon the floor, his hands gripping his abdomen, his face ashen and drawn with agony, his lips in a foam.

"Separate them!" I commanded M'bwala, and myself leapt for the Don. Clearly he had been poisoned. Nothing but a strong emetic might save him. I sent for salt and water. But before it could be brought the Don was already dead.

Meanwhile I knew nothing of what had been happening to Angelina, though I had heard her raise one frightful scream. When I drew back from Don Ramos she was nowhere to be seen; but her victim lay upon the floor, still breathing but beyond recovery, her artery bitten through and weakly gushing blood.

"What is her name?" I asked.

Several voices answered, "Lola."

Then a clamour of explanations broke out; but I clapped my hands for silence. Rita's story had told me all I needed to know. Lola had passed Angelina's guard, though by how narrow a margin her own fate attested.

"And Angelina," I demanded, "where is she?"

At this M'bwala became involved in a sharp quarrel with two of the boys. Before I could interpose he had

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seized them by the neck and thrust them before me, violently scolding them in some language I couldn't understand.

"*Señor*," he explained in his broken Spanish. "I tell them hold Angelina. I tell them not let go. But they let go. Because she say give them rum. Because she have big store rum. Because she a thief...."

"Enough, M'bwala!" I cut him short.

It seemed a trifling matter that Angelina had escaped. Her power was broken now, and she would probably take her own life. But I had to uphold M'bwala's authority; so summoning what show of anger I could I commanded the boys to find Angelina immediately on pain of a flogging. M'bwala emphasised the order with expletives of his own tongue, and shaking them so violently by the neck that their teeth rattled he marched them to the door and thrust them out.

It was necessary once more to call for silence as the room was again in a buzz of talk. I detailed some of the women to attend to the body of Don Ramos, others to carry away the girl, and ordered the rest to be about their duties.

As they were dispersing Rita sidled up to me, though till then I had not noticed her, and laid her hands on mine in the old caressing way. "Now, if you are quick," she said; "if you send M'bwala to follow Cristobal...."

I could find no word, no gesture, worthy to express my disgust; but I was saved the need of replying, for at that moment the two boys who had been sent in pursuit

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of Angelina came bursting into the chamber crying in alarm, "The slaves, *señor!* The slaves!"

I ran to the door where they stood pointing down towards the barracoon. The slaves had broken free, and frenziedly shrieking were already through the gate and plunging across the river, while the crocodiles, thrown into a panic, became a wriggling mass, as though the very banks were taken in a convulsive undulation, and slipped beneath the water. And the explanation of the catastrophe was clear, though whether Angelina had bribed the guards or simply found them asleep would never be resolved. But it was she who had opened the gate; and her deformed figure could be seen by the guard-house, brandishing her sticks as the slaves streamed past her, like an embodiment of the spirit of vengeance that informed the savage horde that she had loosed upon us, mad for blood.

The alarm spread rapidly. Some of the servants were already making for the bush. Others, with the women, came clamouring back to the great chamber, calling on me to save them. And then, for some reason, I remembered the alarm beacon. I believe I was about to give the futile instruction to have it lit; but glancing towards it I was amazed to see it alight already, shooting straight into the air an immense column of flame. So Lola had had an accomplice, ready to signal to Cristobal as soon as the poison had been successfully administered; for the beacon must have been burning some while, and Cristobal would even now be hurrying home to take

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possession. The realisation of all this passed through my mind, but actually I was giving orders for our defence against the slaves. I knew that certain preparations had been made for such an eventuality, unlikely as it was reckoned. In an adjacent room there was a well-furnished arm-rack and a chest of ammunition, and a couple of cannon outside the house. I set the boys to supplying themselves with cutlasses and muskets, and ranged them along the veranda, while I went myself with M'bwala to load the cannon. The only hope was in frightening the slaves to a standstill before they went wild with slaughter and destruction, and so dispersing them into the bush where they might be tempted without more ado to slip away to their own homes. It was a desperate hope, and M'bwala at least saw no life in it, for as I was busied with the cannon he said, "This no good, *señor*. More better run now; after cannot." I told him we must fight first. He said no more, but with a shrug helped me charge and lay the cannon; yet my heart sank, for if he had judged rightly the temper of his own people they would sweep through our thin defence and trample us down in a single stampede.

They had reached the shore by the time I had loaded the cannon. I knew nothing of gunnery, but the target was amply spread; so without waste of time I touched off the fuses one after the other, and sent a couple of balls hurtling. As luck would have it they were well aimed. They ripped down the long untidy column, cutting a double track plainly discernible. Our own men

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set up a yell of triumph, and some in their excitement let off their muskets. And indeed I thought for the moment that my bravado was justified; for the entire mass came to a halt, those on land falling flat on their faces, and a few beginning to sneak away to right and left. "You see, M'bwala!" I shouted, and mopping out the cannon was for recharging. But something seemed to be happening down below. The slaves broke into a sudden cry, and rallying came surging forward again. Then I saw what it was that had lashed them back to fury. Cristobal, borne on a hammock, was emerging from a jungle track. They had seen him, and became one single howl for his blood. He had no time so much as to draw his pistol before the foremost were upon him. Immediately he was hidden from me as they closed him about, but I heard his scream even above the frantic whooping of his captors. The next moment torn limbs were flung into the air, and an uplifted pole bore a human head upon it; then crowding about this ghastly banner,

and emitting yells that turned the blood cold, the slaves came swarming up the hill. I continued mechanically to load the cannon, stuffing them almost to the muzzle with grape. I had no definite thought in my head, but merely a sort of picture of the whole horde blown into fragments, and the earth cleared of them forever. I was anticipating this frightful consummation, I remember, with a grim exultancy, and paid no heed to M'bwala though I was conscious of him crying to me, "No good, *señor!* All lost! Run now!" I had the

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cannon ready, and was standing by awaiting the moment to discharge them, when from the corner of my eye I saw M'bwala's fist shooting at my temple. The blow was so swift that I couldn't move an inch to evade it, and so precise that I felt nothing of the impact, instantaneously insensible. Yet before it fell I had time for one lightning thought of the intensest bitterness: "Even M'bwala will betray!"

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CHAPTER NINE

I CAME back to consciousness through a dream of drowning. I opened my eyes to receive a drench of water in my face. Then I was aware of M'bwala's voice, though for a little his gabble was unintelligible to me. By degrees, however, it focused into sense. He was assuring me, "All safe now." He was asking for pardon. He was holding a wet cloth to my forehead saying, "This M'bwala hit too strong." I remembered what had happened, and realised that M'bwala had taken the one way to save me. I opened my eyes again and struggled to a sitting posture, while M'bwala broke into exclamations of delight mingled with further self-rebukes and pleas for forgiveness. "You're a good boy, M'bwala," I said, and that satisfied him.

It was hardly necessary for him to explain what had happened. Having knocked me senseless he slung me over his shoulder and ran for the bush, where the boys and the women had already preceded him. He had lain in hiding for an hour or so. There had been a certain pursuit, and a few victims had been captured and haled

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back for sacrifice. But the blazing of the buildings, and particularly the triumphant howl that went up at the first finding of rum, recalled the rest of the pursuers, and M'bwala knew that the immediate danger was over. He crept from cover, and shouldering me once more carried me to the nearest water and set to bringing me round. "Now all safe," he ended his story. "Much rum, much women. They shout all night; they sleep all day. Now never find." Indeed the confused screeching that came to us was evidence that the orgy was well under way, and though I shuddered at the hideous picture that rose to my imagination, yet I knew it was to this very bestiality that I owed my life.

But where were we to go? M'bwala had his answer ready. We would follow the Señor Nick and join Bulobu's people. He would lend us men, and in a few weeks we could take Molumbo again and all would be as before. I made no comment on the second part of his programme, but to the first I gave instant sanction. "Let us start at once," I said.

It was a ten days' journey by caravan to Bulobu's people, but travelling unimpeded I thought we should do it in little over half the time, so although Nick was three days ahead of us I had every hope of overtaking him. But I had not reckoned with the jungle. Mantled without in a garish green, within it was a mournful greyness. The track was a mere tunnel closed to either side and overhead by a writhing texture of branches and lianas. Hardly a ray of sunshine penetrated to it, and

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this with the continuous dripping of the foliage, like some monstrous vegetable perspiration, kept the soil beneath in a sodden slush. Creepers caught at the feet, and briars in a riot of growth thrust thorny shoots across the path, impeding us at every third step. And the air, hot, moist, fetid with decay, was a suffocation rather than a refreshment, so that my head, still buzzing from M'bwala's blow, was soon in such a throb that I feared the bursting of a vessel. Moreover the mosquitoes hung about us in a cloud, stabbing remorselessly; a more virulent species, as it seemed, than those at Molumbo, breaking through my immunity and poisoning my blood into a fever. I use the word deliberately; because on the second day I was in a true fever, and I verily believe it was due to the venom of these malicious little flies. As a result the whole journey is but a hazy memory. There were times when I threw myself to earth, unable to move a step, and lay violently shivering, or burning as though in a furnace; then the attack would pass off and I found myself able to stagger forward again. I believe for whole hours M'bwala would carry me; and even when I was master of my limbs, it was only the inspiration of his great back in front of me, imperturbably advancing, that drew me after. He carried a cutlass, I remember, and kept it continuously in play, hacking the path clear of entanglements; and occasionally he would stop abruptly and warn me to circumvent an ant-hill or stoop low beneath a hanging hornet's nest. It was he too who kept me in food, principally

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on plantains, berries and roots. Sometimes he concocted a herb stew, with a relish of snails and lizards. And I believe he was guilty of a little poaching, because as we circled to avoid some village, or after he had strung up for me at night a hammock of creepers, he would leave me for a space and return with pine-apples to quench my thirst knowing that my stomach

revolted against the foul water of the rivers. In short, without him I should have perished a thousand times over. Yet in the weakness of my fever I would cry on him to leave me and let me die; and when he said, "I carry you, *señor*," I would kick and scold like a child. But in my saner hours I would plod behind him with a single wonder occupying my bemused mind: the amazing fidelity of this man. "Black from skin to soul!" the Captain's phrase repeated itself in my memory; and already I was half prepared to accept the indictment, had not M'bwala given it the lie.

Even so the jungle would have claimed me. But inland the country rose, opening out eventually into meadow and woodland, with air to breathe and, mountains ahead. Here there were villages plain to the day, and fields under cultivation. Yet there was a menace in this too. We didn't know what rumours had preceded us; and in any case travelling as we were we would have aroused suspicion. A white man with a single escort would have told its own tale. So now we lay hidden by day and advanced by night. But wretchedly weak as I still was, my life returned on a full enough flow to reanimate

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my resolution, and I forced myself to keep pace with M'bwala so as to come up with Nick and apprise him of the situation before he reached Bulobu.

As it happened we overhauled him with a day to spare. We had passed him during a night march, and in the morning, as we were casting about for a hiding-place, we saw his caravan already on the move. But to have accosted him as we were would have betrayed to his men some disaster at Molumbo. M'bwala, however, was at no loss. He left me, and hurrying to the nearest village bought the services of half a dozen men. The white Mongo in the caravan was in need of bearers, he told them. They must provide a hammock and sun-shade, and must be well armed, and the Mongo would repay them generously. In this way I was able to approach the caravan in sufficient state to allay suspicion.

I told Nick in a few words what had happened.

"Christ!" he exclaimed. And that exhausted his emotion; for the next moment he declared with gay confidence, "Well, this is where we step in, old boy. We'll set Papa Bulobu to sweep up the mess, and there's a snug little berth all ready for David and Jonathan. Seems almost like providence."

“And what will Papa Bulobu say,” I asked, “when we tell him that the market’s closed to his slaves?”

“Lord, Joey!” he cried, “you’ve come prepared for trouble, haven’t you? Set teeth and back to the wall, the bull-dog breed, and all that! But I dare say that old black dad of mine will prefer half a market to no

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market at all. Still, you’ll have to let me do the palavering.” And avoiding further discussion he drew me into a fuller account of the mutiny. Yet he only gave me half his attention, obviously preoccupied with the difficulties ahead.

We reached Bulobu’s capital the next morning. A messenger was sent on ahead to announce our coming, so we were welcomed in state. Warriors lined the road from the outer gate to the central plaza where Bulobu himself awaited us. He was seated in a massive chair, shaded from the sun with a scarlet umbrella, and was dressed in an admiral’s frock coat and a loin cloth. Behind him was a body-guard armed with cutlasses and muskets, and to either side were his chief men. The plaza itself was bordered deep with the townsfolk who maintained a continuous rattle of tom-toms and clash of tambourines. Salutations over, Nick ordered forward his present to Bulobu. This created a diversion, for it was no less than a vast four-poster bed, and it required some half an hour to its construction; but once assembled the enthusiasm it aroused was inexpressible. Bulobu stretched himself upon it, and ordered his councillors one after another to do the same, being so patently delighted that I expected a royal summons proclaiming an immediate siesta. But he compromised by making it for the time his seat of state from which he presided over the banquet already in evident preparation. Bullocks were led in, slaughtered before the whole company, and roasted whole, enormous portions being

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served us with bowls of steaming rice, and impossible measures of rum, while a band of dancers and singers accompanied the revel with a frenzied din. But how it all ended I didn’t know, because I was taken with a shivering fit and felt the fever coming upon me again. I begged leave to retire, and somehow or other found myself lying on a pallet in a dark hut, while the uproar from without mingled confusedly with the throbbing in my own head.

I was better the next morning, but ridiculously weak. When Nick asked me if I thought I could face a palaver with Bulobu I told him I could more easily face another banquet. He was clearly relieved; and I must confess that I was glad of an excuse to leave the matter to him. Bulobu would require diplomatic handling, and that was beyond me. Nick saw me laid outside in the fresh air, and leaving M'bwala to attend to me set off to present his case to Bulobu. "If you hear anything go snap," he said, "that's probably my neck being broken; then you'd better put a bullet in your head!"

The palaver lasted all day. M'bwala brought me reports from time to time, consisting chiefly of "Bulobu very angry." And in the evening Nick returned. He looked rather worn, but with his gaiety still undashed.

"What luck?" I asked.

"The old heathen!" he exclaimed. "If there had never been any slavery he would invent it. But he's come round all right."

"Well, that's good work," I said.

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"Gad, but I had to pitch him a yarn!" Nick went on. "He'd already got wind of something wrong, and was out for battle like a rogue elephant. I let him believe that half the British navy had bombarded Molumbo, and that slavery was a closed book, and if he wanted to have anything out of the wreckage he must be content with honest trade in future. That was all there was to it. He called me a traitor, and I added a little to my story, and he called me a worse kind of traitor, and I added a little more to my story; and the evening and the morning were the first day. Still, he's promised to send an expedition to clear up Molumbo, and we can get your department going again. But he'll probably go back on it tomorrow, and the evening and the morning will be the second day. But in any case, old boy, you'll have to harden your tender heart to a little unpleasantness."

Nick spoke with so unusual a significance that I exclaimed, "What on earth do you mean?"

"He happens to have a pen-ful of slaves on hand," Nick explained, "and you can hardly expect him to return them to their mamas."

There was no need to press him to be more explicit.

"It'll be pretty grizzly," he added, "but we've got to go through with it. Unless—there are some three hundred of them, remember—I suppose there's no moving you, Joey?"

“Slavery’s got to end,” I declared stubbornly, “and the sooner the better.”

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“Of course,” he retorted, “I was forgetting. It’s really perfectly simple! —Sweet dreams, old boy!”

The next day, as Nick had anticipated, Bulobu called for a further palaver, which was repeated the day following. But at length he seemed to realise that Nick was not to be shaken, and he made a definite promise for the early dispatch of an expedition to Molumbo.

First, however, there were the slaves to be disposed of. It was to be a grand occasion, for if they were worthless as merchandise they could at least be made to provide sport. Naturally I had every wish to avoid such a spectacle, but Nick insisted on my presence. If we held aloof, he argued, Bulobu would ascribe the stoppage of the slave traffic to our mere personal distaste, and that would be fatal; so when we were offered seats next to Bulobu himself we accepted as though receiving an honour.

The braves were drawn up in a circle about the plaza, with the townsfolk pressing behind, eager spectators. Bulobu, with his chief men about him, once more took his seat in his great chair of state; but he had discarded his naval magnificence, and apart from his innumerable ornaments was dressed only in a simple cotton loin-wrap. I felt there was something symbolic in this. I had seen a little of what the black man had made of the white, and what the white man had made of the black; but the coming display was to owe nothing to this vicious intermixture. It was to be pure native; and it

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was fitting that Bulobu should dress for it in the manner of his own people.

What followed I will dismiss as briefly as I can. The slaves were led into the centre of the plaza, and with cords of twisted bamboo fibre were bound to stakes driven into the ground. At a signal from Bulobu a war-drum sounded. The warriors with a whoop rushed upon their victims, not to kill, but to torture. Ears were cut off, and women’s breasts; limbs prodded and gashed; noses and cheeks skewered with knives; hands and feet lopped away; eyes gouged out; all to an ecstatic yelling. Then for a while the tormentors drew back, as though to revel in the contemplation of their work. Again the drum sounded, this time with a more tremendous booming, and accompanied with a crash of tambourines. The warriors leapt forward

once more smiting right and left with clubs and spears, howling in the intoxication of slaughter. Heads were staved in, bodies disembowelled, limbs rent off and tossed into the air. The ground became a welter of flesh, a pool of blood, where a riot of black figures, not yet glutted, screamed and splashed and trampled. And so compelling was the glamour of that insensate carnage that at one moment I found myself on my feet, waving my arms, and yelling with the rest. But when the blood was gathered into gourds and passed from mouth to mouth I felt sick to faintness, and gripped at my seat to hold myself from swooning away.

And I, quite literally, was the author of all this. I had

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foreseen it; yet I had decreed it. "Perfectly simple!" Nick's taunt returned to me. But just then my spirit was loud in outcry against the irony that had forced me to such a decision. For I had prided myself on my assurance; but now I was enveloped in such a blackness of doubt that I felt I should know no peace to the end of my life.

The next morning the expedition set out. But it was some days before the dogs and the vultures could reduce that red horror to bones; and the stench was frightful.

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CHAPTER TEN

NICK and I were not permitted to accompany the expedition, though Nick's escort was dispatched to a man. I say not permitted, for although Bulobu declared that it was for our own safety that he was retaining us, yet his motive quite obviously was to hold us in his power till the reestablishment of the factory was a certainty. If the expedition failed we should be sacrificed to his chagrin. We knew this quite well, and the knowledge darkened what would otherwise have been a pleasant little holiday. Once the town had been cleared of traces of the recent butcher it was a delightful place to idle in; and for me at least, with the fever to nurse away, it was salvation. The air was clear, free of the infection of the coastal swamps and the jungle; and though the heat by day was prostrating, yet one could sling a hammock beneath a tree; and the nights were cool.

The people—if only one could have put out of mind that debauch of blood—were as charming a race of children as one could wish to meet. They were so approachable, so full of chatter and laughter, their needs

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were so simple, their lives so open to the day, that one felt that somehow they had come quite easily upon the secret of happiness so elusive to the white man's sophisticated research. It was a delight to me, lying in shade, to watch the life of the plaza: women before the huts squatting at their cooking, men in twos and threes grinding corn, kneading dough, perhaps dividing the slaughtered carcass of a bullock, boys coming in from the woods driving oxen stacked with fuel, or from the river carrying loads of fish, old men, pipe in mouth, sunning themselves in gossiping groups, and everywhere brown babies rolling in the dust and naked children at contented play. It was a communal paradise where all worked and all shared; and living beneath the wide sky there was no shame, no concealment, whether in occupation or in person, the human body in its health and vigour being worthy of ornament but not to be degraded with dress.

The town itself consisted of a series of enclosures. It was guarded on the outside by an impenetrable hedge of thorn some twenty feet both in height and thickness. At either end was a barricaded gateway with a wide straight

road leading to an inner enclosure of stout piles, spiked at the top, and set a slit apart from one another to allow of archery in defence. The ample space between these enclosures was given over to cotton and maize on one side, and on the other to the cattle, cared for principally by boys who would keep watch from crazy-looking towers, like little huts precariously erected

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on slender bamboos. Within the inner stockade was the plaza, set with a few giant cotton trees, with Bulobu's chair at one end, and the huts of the townsfolk—mere conical shelters of cane and leaves—arranged in straight rows around the other three sides. And in one corner there was a third enclosure, also strongly palisaded: the residence of Bulobu himself. There was room here both for his women and his body-guard. It was provided too with its own well, and in case of a determined attack would constitute the last line of defence like the keep of a medieval castle.

Nick and I were both allotted huts within this sanctuary—or possibly prison. We had the freedom of the town during the day; but we were respectfully forbidden to wander outside. And at night, even if we had meditated escape, it would have been well-nigh impossible, guarded as we were with a triple watch at the gates.

Yet Bulobu was all smiles to us. For a week or so he was occupied in supervising the construction of a hut spacious enough to contain his new four-poster bed. As a further recreation he took to learning English, pointing to things for us to name, repeating the names after us, and laughing uproariously at his own mispronunciations. I think as a matter of fact he was naturally genial. He was admittedly a fine figure of a man, showing no trace, in spite of his forty odd years, of the flabbiness and corpulency of middle age; and his face bore strongly imprinted upon it the signs of command. Yet, although his warriors were excellently disciplined and

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under perfect control, he was clearly less at ease on the parade ground or in the council chair than lolling in the sun listening to some endless story while his children romped over him.

Altogether then, provided good news came from Molumbo, our stay with Bulobu promised to be a restful interlude. But the promise was not fulfilled.

One morning I awoke to the booming of the war-drum and wild cries of alarm. M'bwala rushed into my hut shouting, "Enemy come!" And while I was still pulling on my clothes Nick came running in too. "Be quick, for the Lord's sake!" he cried. "It's an invasion!"

I stuck a cutlass in my belt, stuffed my pockets with balls, and with my pistols in hand was for following Nick to wherever the battle might be raging. But M'bwala blocked the doorway.

"Stop! Think!" he pressed us earnestly. "This all people war. This big big war. Because Bulobu take slaves. Because now time come revenge. Perhaps Bulobu kill. Perhaps town burn. Perhaps all end. Then what happen white man? More better run."

For the second time I had to say to M'bwala, "We must fight first."

"No, no!" he cried. "Then too late. Enemy come in. Shut gate. How you go? All in trap. All kill. How you go?"

"It can't be helped, M'bwala," I told him. "We can't run away from our friends."

"Bulobu no friend!" he exclaimed.

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"See here, M'bwala," Nick touched him lightly with a forefinger, "Bulobu is the father of my wife. So no more talk."

M'bwala shook his head sadly and stood aside for us to pass. We rushed out, but he pushed ahead of us saying, "Follow; I show way." And as we ran together into the plaza he thrust into my hand a musket which he had somehow procured. "Take," he said. "You no musket. M'bwala have club." I accepted the weapon gladly, stowing my pistols in my belt. As for Nick, he already had a musket, and a waistful of weapons besides.

We hurried through the plaza, where the women and children were huddled together like frightened sheep, and into which the boys were driving the cattle as though in readiness for a siege, and made for one of the outer gates. Here there was a small contingent of warriors on guard, but the main body was already drawn up outside prepared with bows and spears to meet the onslaught of the enemy. It was to be a battle of primitive weapons, and our fire-arms, once the armies were engaged hand to hand, would be useless impediments. Even so we were for taking our stand in the front, but M'bwala had conceived of a better plan. Within easy musket range of the gate was one of those cattle watchtowers that I have mentioned. M'bwala drew us across to this. "Climb!" he said. "Enemy soon come. Many men go

Molumbo. Bulobu very weak. Enemy soon come. Battle by gate. Battle long time. You shoot. You

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kill many men. Up top, good. Below, no club, no spear, no good. Climb!" The argument seemed unanswerable. We ran up the slender ladder and took our places in the shelter above, while M'bwala strode away to join the party by the gate.

From our vantage we could see well over the thorn hedge, and had the whole country in view. Patches of smoke and fire showed where the outlying villages were burning. And looking back to the other gate we saw that an attack was to be launched there too. Possibly a mere diversion to keep Bulobu's army divided, for it was the defence of our end that Bulobu had taken under his own charge. But the battle before us was already opening. The enemy had halted some half a mile from the town, showing how near they had come to taking Bulobu by surprise. And indeed his enemies must have joined in a determined confederacy against him, for though he was by far the most powerful potentate for a hundred miles around, yet he was outnumbered by at least ten to one. The enemy were disposing themselves for the attack; and suddenly with a howl they came running forward, brandishing their spears. They were met at some three hundred paces by a volley of arrows. They advanced undeterred, though the arrows now showering them thinned their ranks, and the ground became dotted with the bodies of the fallen. But there seemed no hope of staying them. Yet not till the last moment did Bulobu give the signal for retreat. There was a rush for the gate, with the enemy yelling in pursuit;

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but by the time they were up to it it was already a bristle of spears. Then began a savage thrusting and smiting till the entrance seemed choked with the dead. Yet trampling the fallen beneath them the enemy leapt wildly in, themselves to fall and be trampled under, while Bulobu's men, instantly filling every gap, opposed them like a wall. However, I had no eyes now for the details of the conflict, for Nick and I could now bring our muskets into play, firing over the heads of the defenders into the pressing mass of the enemy. I don't know how long this lasted; but suddenly there was a cry of triumph from within, and the enemy seemed in full flight. It was an old stratagem, and it nearly succeeded. Bulobu's men began to surge through

the gateway in pursuit; but Bulobu must have had a wonderful control over them, for he managed to recall them. Yet only just in time, for the enemy turned, deluged them with arrows, and rushed back to the assault.

However, there came a respite, for such fighting could not continue indefinitely. The invaders drew back in good order, and rested for a little out of bow-shot, while Bulobu kept his men within the gate, warily on the defensive. A second attack ended similarly. But a break through seemed inevitable, for Bulobu was too hopelessly outnumbered, and his men were visibly tiring. Yet the break through when it came was due less to force than to cunning. Under cover of the fighting the enemy sent a detachment round to the other gate, where, opposed less strongly, they succeeded in forcing

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their way in. How the news was signalled to Bulobu I don't know, but he must have been immediately advised of it or he would have been taken in the rear before he could withdraw to the inner stockade. His men too must have been well trained in the manœuvre of retreat. The foremost made a desperate push against the besiegers, while the remainder turned and ran, but leaving as a second rear-guard a line of bowmen drawn across the road. The enemy, repulsed for a moment, drove in again, overwhelming the slender resistance at the gate. Finding the passage clear they raised a triumphant whoop and came bursting through; but the next instant a shock of arrows threw them into a tumbled confusion. It was but for an instant, for they were immediately up and swarming forward again, sweeping the archers down, and pursuing Bulobu in full cry.

This much I was aware of; but Nick's comment, "Gad, old boy, this is where we're in a trap!" brought me to the consciousness of our own peril. Even so, for a moment I had the hope that in the rush we would be passed by. But the hope was dashed. We had been seen; for three men came leaping across the grass towards our retreat. Nick brought one down with his musket, and a second I winged so that he fell to his knees; but the third still made for us. When he drew close we could settle him with our pistols, but each step he took increased the danger of his putting others on our scent. Indeed a fourth man came darting from the crowd in his wake. That seemed to be the end. "In their death

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they were not divided, and no flowers by request!" I heard Nick say. But when the new-comer in passing staved in the head of the fellow I had wounded, and springing after the last man brought him to earth with a smashing blow, I recognised him as B'bwala. That was the last service he ever rendered me. The next moment he fell with a dozen spears through his body. But he had saved our secret. The invaders swept past us unsuspecting.

There was nothing to do but to lie low while the battle raged around the inner stockade. Peeping from our cover we could see something of the fight. The enemy could now attack from all sides, but Bulobu had sufficient men to circle the wall, and could use his archery in defence. The women and children meanwhile had withdrawn into the royal enclosure, driving in some of the cattle with them. This seemed an ominous sign. Even so the defence was stubborn. The besiegers tore down the palisades, only to be met with an irresistible phalanx of spears against which they hurled themselves in vain. But the gaps appeared at more frequent intervals, widened, draining the defence. Yet it was well after noon before Bulobu gave the signal for the final retreat. This was more difficult than the withdrawal to the stockade, and was a triumphant witness to Bulobu's power of command. It demanded the ruthless sacrifice of half his men, who with superb devotion stood unflinchingly at the breaches of the broken rampart while the rest hurried into shelter. Hurried; yet even at our

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distance we could see how now hardly a man of them but limped and staggered as he ran. Of the defenders left behind not one could hope to survive. Breach after breach was carried, and the enemy streamed through, hurling themselves with a shriller yelling, a fiercer vigour, upon that last stronghold. With piles uprooted from the stockade they drove at the wall before them, thrusting between the stakes and wedging them apart, even grappling them with their bare arms and heaving them from the earth with the strength of madness, and when all else failed mounting upon one another's shoulders and leaping over. The wall swayed visibly to the impact, was pushed awry, was trampled flat. The end seemed momentarily at hand. But the defence was magnificent. It must have been a full hour before the resistance gave. And then it was as though the wall had suddenly opened a hundred mouths and sucked the invaders through. They broke into an exultant howl which was drowned on the instant by such a scream of

terror from the women as turned the heart sick. The next moment the cattle came bounding through the gaps in the palisade, and set off in a blind gallop bellowing in panic. But the final slaughter, though we had ears for it, was hidden from our eyes.

The tumult gradually died down, and eventually the conquerors came filing back into the plaza. They brought no captives with them. This told us nothing, however, of the fate of the women. They might have been massacred with the men and the children, or they

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might be held prisoners within. Death or slavery; in either event theirs was a poor bargain. "Well, Joey," Nick said, "there's a pair of us widowers now!"

The next few minutes were an anxious time for us. A round-up seemed likely to ensure that none of the wounded should escape. This would mean our certain capture. But we dared not leave our hiding-place. The gate was not actually guarded, but a number of the wounded enemy had crawled together into little groups, the better, it seemed, to beat away the vultures already busy about the corpses, and not too particular whether or not life were already extinct—and though they might be unable to pursue us they were alert enough to bring us down with their bows. So we lay still in a fever of suspense, our eyes on the movements of those men in the plaza.

At first they gathered about the wells, noisily quarrelling among themselves for water. Then with inexpressible relief we saw them set to on the cattle. In a very short time they were disposed over the enclosure in squatting circles, each with its own fire blazing and a bullock roasting in the flames. After all it was now some three hours or less to sundown, and they had been fighting since early morning, after a night's march too, without a mouthful of food. If they feasted well and fell asleep, replete and wearied to exhaustion, we should have the whole night before us to effect our get-away.

We discussed plans. Our obvious route was the river. If we could find a canoe we must eventually reach the

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sea. The river lay about a mile away, with grass-lands sloping gently down to it, and at one point was a shore-side village surrounded with fields of maize and rice-paddies. The village had been set on fire and was still

smouldering; but it was the more likely to be empty, and there would probably be boats there. Clearly that was our way.

The wounded began a slow procession down the road, dragging themselves laboriously towards food and water. Our own palates were dry and our stomachs empty; but we could do nothing but lie quiet and wait for the night.

It was a sad blow to our hopes when, shortly before sunset, a party of men came strolling up the road and installed themselves as a guard at the gateway. As they approached, the wounded who were too weak to move clamoured after them crying as it seemed for water. They paid no heed except to kick aside those that lay in their path. Reaching the gate they hacked it down and built it into a fire for the night, sprawling themselves on the ground around it half dazed with fatigue. They would probably sleep, but the risk of passing them would be serious. We seemed to be taken in a trap after all.

The darkness fell rapidly. We watched the men by the gate. Some were clearly sleeping, but one or two were maintaining a droning talk. It was tedious waiting. Possibly an hour slipped away; but the talk continued.

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Then suddenly Nick said, "Gad, Joey, I believe I've got a plan!"

It was to scale the thorn hedge by means of the ladder of our tower.

The plan had such promise in it that I was instantly ready for the venture. The only drawback was that we must leave our muskets behind as they would be too great an encumbrance in battling over such an obstacle.

The ladder was secured at the top with thongs. We slashed these through, descended, and let the ladder to the ground. We couldn't be seen as the moon had not yet risen and the darkness was intense; and we weren't afraid of being heard because the cattle grazing about us would cover our own movements. We carried the ladder to the hedge, not setting it up at once, but skirting some way to put distance between us and the guard. Then we raised the ladder, mounted, scrambled on to the dense surface of the thorns, laid the ladder across, crawled along it to the farther side, lowered it and climbed down. The operation, though, was not quite so easy as I have described it. In crossing the top we had to move slowly, freeing ourselves as we went from the entangling thorns; and we were cruelly scarred and the clothing was half torn from us before we had effected our descent; yet even

so the escape once achieved seemed so ludicrously simple that we stood for a little holding to each other and shaking with suppressed laughter.

For a mark to steer by we had the dull glow of the smouldering village. Drawing near we approached it

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with extreme caution, but hearing no sound we entered. As we expected, we found it deserted except for the dead. We made our way to the beach; but the first sight of the water brought us into such a rage of thirst that forgetting that we were in search of a canoe we threw ourselves on our knees and drank. The river came from the mountains, and flowed not through a jungly swamp but over a bed of stones, and the clear cold water was like new muscle and new nerve. Satisfied at last we rose and began to cast about us for a boat. We came upon a number quite soon, drawn up in a row along the shore; and examining them we found that they were in good order, apparently untouched in the morning raid. Entirely reassured now we were in no hurry. We returned to the village to forage for food. Pushing among the ashes we found eggs, rice, maize, baked brown by the fire, and an abundance of fish, some scorched to cinders, some smoked to a turn. We fed well. And thinking ahead we stored our canoe, when we had finally selected it, with a supply to last us as we reckoned for several days. There seemed no more to be done; so with the moon rising, as though sent providentially to light our way, we pushed off from shore, and making well into the current began to paddle down stream.

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CHAPTER ELEVEN

IT WAS within half an hour of pushing off that we narrowly escaped shipwreck on a submerged boulder. The shock was sobering; for so confident had we been, as though the adventure were no more than a holiday spree, that it needed some such warning to bring us to the realisation that we knew nothing of what the river might have in store for us in the way of shoals and falls. After this we moved more cautiously. We allowed the current to bear us, paddling no more than was sufficient to give us steerage way, and keeping a sharp lookout for suspicious eddies. For my part my earlier lightheartedness yielded to the unsettlement of a teased imagination. The moon, bright as it was, shone with so deceptive a light, and played such tricks upon the water, that my eyes peering as through a film pictured the most fantastic dangers. With the slow passing of the hours, uneventful yet with every moment tense with menace, I began to find the strain intolerable, and was eventually obliged to leave Nick to watch the course while I sat in the stern and steered to his bidding.

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With the first coming of the morning we drew into the concealment of some shore-side bushes, for knowing nothing of the people whose territory we should pass through we could not risk journeying by day. We allowed ourselves a limited meal, and being thoroughly fatigued slept well.

The second night to begin with was a repetition of the first, but after some hours paddling we began to be aware of a curious low murmur. It increased as we progressed, growing at length into a distinct booming. The strengthening race of the current confirmed our worst fears: there was a fall ahead. We steered well in shore, where the stream flowed less powerfully, and with ears alertly estimating the distance of the danger paddled cautiously forward. If it had not been for Nick I should have long since moored to the bank and waited for the light, but Nick insisted on making the last inch. He laughed down my angry expostulations so that I fell sulkily silent, but expecting momentarily to feel the boat whirled out of control. Indeed it was not till the plunging seemed to sound immediately beneath us that Nick caught at an overhanging branch and brought the

canoe to rest, while I gripped at the gunwale to steady my reeling brain which pictured us balanced on the brink.

It was too dark to see our position as the shore was here walled in with great trees which blackened out the moonlight; but holding to the branch we felt our way towards the bank while the canoe tugged beneath our feet like a living thing. Suddenly the tugging relaxed,

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and we found ourselves in placid water. The truth was that we had come into the shelter of a fallen tree.

Here we moored. Nick curled himself up to sleep; but with the cataract thundering so ominously near I couldn't trust our lashings, and fearing lest some insidious sucking of the current should draw us back into the stream I braced an arm about a branch of our protecting tree and sat resolutely on guard till the morning.

The light showed us still at some little remove from the fall; it showed us too already in the jungle. We made our way along the bank, wading, sinking in mud, scrambling over innumerable obstructions, till we came to the edge of the fall, where we lay on an up-sloping rock and peered over. There was a sheer drop of some fifty feet over which the water slipped in a single sheet, to race churning and foaming along a bed of tumbled boulders, but gradually smoothing out into a jungle stream. The problem was, how to get the canoe into the quieter water, for unless we could accomplish this we should be compelled to follow the river on foot, where the mud and the crocodiles permitted, and elsewhere take to the jungle, fighting our way inch by inch through some hundreds of miles of matted vegetation. There was nothing for it but to prospect for a path, or even hack one out if need were, where we could carry our canoe; and we must work in the daylight risking observation.

We returned to the canoe and fortified ourselves with a good meal; then drawing it well under cover we

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stuck our weapons in our belts and made back to the rock by the fall. Here with cutlasses in hand we pushed into the jungle, slashing a track as we went and zig-zagging down the descent keeping as closely as we could estimate to the river. It was painfully slow work, for the soil was a network of roots inextricably overgrown with thorns and creepers, and the heavy air

made breathing difficult so that our muscles grew languid and our whole bodies came out in a violent perspiration. The place was alive too with annoyances and dangers. At one moment, clambering over a decayed hole, I received an instantaneous shock as though my skin had been stuck at every point with needles, and I found myself swarmed over with ants which had to be picked off one by one, so resolutely they bit. At another moment pulling aside a hanging liana the thing became a snake which slid through my fingers. Yet, except for such delays, and for an occasional pause to confirm our direction by listening for the muffled roaring of the fall, we never halted. Nor did we exchange more than a rare word; for not only did the labour demand our full energies, but the jungle imposed on us its own silence. We lost all clear reckoning of time. Our progress became a monotony of tearing and slashing, broken only by such unpleasantnesses as I have described, and by an occasional change of place; for, as the forward work was the more arduous, we took it in turns to lead, the one behind widening the passage and clearing it of side growths. In this way we advanced, mechanically, with

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bodies torn and minds numbed; but at least we advanced.

When the descent ceased and the ground became more level we cut our way out to the river. With an open prospect once more before us we were immediately free of our dumb oppression. Nick raised a whoop like and excited boy, and exclaimed, "Gad, Joey, if I were Cristobal I would kiss you!"

The fall was now behind us, and the shore here strewn with boulders promised an easier passage than the jungle. If we could bring the canoe to this point we should be able to carry it along the bank till the water became quiet enough to launch it. Though the sun was already declining we thought we might have time to fetch the canoe and even launch it before night, so without more delay we turned upon our tracks.

We retraced the path without serious difficulty, but heaving the canoe through the narrow passage, steep as the descent was, was a more toilsome matter than we had anticipated. We began to wonder whether we should so much as reach the river before the dark fell. Then to add to our perplexities, as we were taking a short rest with our goal as we hoped now near at hand, the bushes suddenly opened before us showing a couple of black faces peering through. We sprang to our feet, but at the same moment the men

leapt back with cries of alarm which were taken up on the instant by a number of other voices, followed by the rush and plunge

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of bodies making into the bush. In less than a minute all was still again; there was not so much as the rustle of a leaf to tell of any living presence, though we knew that eyes must be watching us within a spear's thrust to either side. For a little we stood looking at each other, then of a sudden Nick drew his pistols and fired them one after the other into the jungle, shouting, "Take that, you black sods!" The roar of the detonations was answered by the howl of terror dominated by a single shriek of pain, while the bush shook to a wilder agitation as of animals struggling in blind panic. But this time it did not subside so swiftly, but gradually receded from us to an accompaniment of wailing screams as pathetic as the sobbing of children, while somewhere near at hand the wounded man moaned brokenly. "That'll larn 'em!" Nick said, as he reloaded his pistols and stuffed them back into his belt.

Though we had caused more fear than we had received it was clearly our policy to hurry on. The alarm would spread, and fear might change to anger. Unless we could embark again before night and put a space of river behind us, we should have to lie low the next day in a country roused against us with we knew not what ferocious tribe prowling on our tracks. We set to on the canoe with renewed will. We reached the river. Stumbling over the stones, half dragging the canoe, half carrying it, and sometimes floating it across a smoother pool, we at last came to a point where we

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thought we could venture into the full stream, though it was only the imminent fall of night which decided us. We pushed off, steering desperately through a tangle of rocks and eddies till with the last of the light we came to easier water and knew that the worst of the danger was passed.

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CHAPTER TWELVE

WITH the assurance of safety I felt an overpowering fatigue. Nick had had a little sleep, but I had had none whatever for a night and a day. Sitting in the stern, while Nick kept a look-out in the bows, I paddled without any consciousness of doing so, and was startled awake only when Nick shouted to me some sharp direction. Several times I must have dozed right off, and I suppose I talked a little in my dreams, for once I heard Nick exclaim, "What the hell has Captain Andrew got to do with it?"

My mind was perfectly lucid as though I had been thinking instead of dreaming.

"He was hunted through the jungle for three months," I replied.

"The devil he was!" Nick said.

To keep myself awake I began to talk of the Captain, telling Nick of what I had heard from Don Ramos. I must have wandered in my story, for suddenly Nick burst out laughing.

"I didn't know you had it in you, Joey," he said.

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"It's the best yarn I've ever heard, only rude people would call it a damned lie."

"It's perfectly true," I said.

"Of course it is," he answered; "wasn't I with you myself? But you might write it down for me some day. I'll get it by heart. Yarns of an old salt, the modern Mandeville, and all that!—But look here," he broke off with an abrupt concern, "I suppose you haven't got another dose of fever?"

"I'm simply telling you," I retorted with an angry deliberation, "what happened to Captain Andrew."

"Oh, damn Captain Andrew!" he cried. "Can't you leave him out? He's always butting in where he's not wanted. Still, carry on. Don'cher mind me. You were dancing round a fire in the middle of Africa, with your face painted blue and yellow, and with horns on your head; and you were just about to sacrifice a virgin."

"Well, call it a bad dream," I said.

I understood what had happened. In my perturbed exhaustion I had confused the Captain's adventures with my own; for pale as my

experiences were in comparison with his, yet my life at Molumbo, the flights I had been put to, the blood I had seen shed, the battling through the jungle, and those sudden confronting faces, had blended with all I knew of the Captain's story till with my own mind unsettled and bemused our very identities had become confounded. Indeed the matter had grown into an obsession, gripping me more powerfully than I had realised, and setting my

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imagination riotously at play—to judge from Nick's talk of dancing and sacrifice—with filling in the outlines which had been so slenderly sketched for me.

"You might carry on," Nick repeated, "now that you've got me all worked up. After all—ghosts and murders—you'll never find a better spot."

I tried to continue the story, if only to ease myself from brooding. I did just mention the Captain's expeditions of vengeance, but I have no recollection of finishing the recital. My last memory was indeed of Nick's calling my attention to a dull glow on one of the banks. He said something about a burning village, which took me back in mind to the beginning of our flight. After this I knew no more, collapsed in an utter torpor, till I felt myself being shaken, and opening my eyes found it was already day.

"I thought you'd wake," Nick was saying, "when I told you breakfast was ready."

I looked rather stupidly about me.

We were moored, not among concealing bushes, but beside a landing-stage of lashed bamboos. Before I was alert enough in mind to comment on such a rash exposure Nick began to pour out some surprising information. The whole country-side was deserted, he told me, for a stretch of fifty miles at the least. He had passed several burning villages during the night, and this together with the obvious terror of the men we had met in the jungle had emboldened him in the morning to push on and investigate instead of creeping into

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cover. At every third mile, he declared, the shore to either side showed gutted villages with no sign of human life. And the proof of it was before me, for the landing-stage led to a charred ruin overhung with smoke and with a few blackened canes sticking out at wry angles.

Nick had already foraged for fresh supplies, and we fed without stint. Then restocking our canoe we set out again on our journey, no longer fearing the light.

It was Nick's turn to sleep, so till about noon I paddled the canoe alone. The river flowed sluggishly now amid shoals and sandbanks, thick and yellow as at Molumbo, flanked sombrely with jungle, and with crocodiles basking along the muddy margins. And everywhere, to confirm Nick's story, the shores, once populous, were a wilderness of ashes with the inhabitants either slaughtered or fled into the bush. It was so infinitely mournful that my spirit became absorbed into a profound lethargy through which a pervasive throbbing sounded in an undertone of sadness like the very voice of the desolation about me. But so sunk was I in stupour, brooding on the tragic savagery of this vast dark land, that for a long while that sorrowful throbbing had no clear significance for me. But of a sudden a sharper roll brought me to my senses. I shook Nick awake. "Listen!" I said. "Drums!"

He sat up rubbing his eyes.

"Another bad dream?" he asked.

"Not a dream this time," I told him. "You know

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what that means as well as I do. When they start on their drums..."

We sat listening for a little without exchanging a word, while the air vibrated to a rhythmic intonation, which swelled and subsided, insistent, unlocatable, and answered in the distances as by a muffled echo. It was the jungle, stricken to lamentation, roused to indignation, demanding blood for blood.

As though by a common consent we began to paddle furiously forward. It was no use lying hid, for those jungle folk had an uncanny scent for a trail, and if we were their quarry they would nose us out from the densest cover. Besides, we could move more swiftly on the river than they could on land, and there was the bare chance that we might pass their country before they became mobilised against us; so our best hope lay in flight.

It was strangely terrifying. Every now and again the drums broke out so startlingly near at hand that we could hear the accompanying chant of voices, plaintive like the moan of hurt beasts, yet with a relentless menace in its pitiful monotony that numbed the nerves. Then abruptly it would cease, to be taken up far ahead of us in a faint repetitive cadence like some

answering signal, so that we seemed to be snared in a closing trap. I was thankful for the good daylight, for though the night would have hidden us yet I knew that in the dark my resolution would have gone down in panic

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before the fascination of that unseen and hovering pursuit.

For hours we continued to paddle, working our bodies like slaves; but the throbbing still hung about us, still echoed ahead, like a cloud of sound threatening storm but refusing to break. Soon the night would be on us, and yet we were not clear...

So resolute had been our silence, so intense the strain, that it was shattering to hear Nick exclaim in his bantering way, "What about Captain Andrew? Isn't another instalment due?"

But the next moment Captain Andrew was forgotten; for as we rounded a bend in the river the reach beyond was no longer enclosed with jungle, but showed a skyline clear to the horizon. Nick sprang to his feet, nearly capsizing the canoe, and shouted, "The sea! The sea!"

It was the sea indeed. The booming of the surf was so distinctly audible that it was surprising that we had not noticed it long since; except that in all probability we would have done so had not our ears been confused with that persistent drumming. But the drums were voiceless for us now; for as we drove forward, quite out of ourselves with an unreasoning exultation, the river reek of mud and stale decay became pervaded with the sharp salt tang of ocean. It set us both into a wild whooping, so intoxicated were we with the sudden sense of deliverance. But as we drew nearer we became more subdued and advanced less strenuously, falling quite silent at last, and hanging on our paddles, for that

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featureless expanse of water before us, unbroken by a sail, seemed to stand up across the river mouth like an unscalable wall.

We sat surveying it in mute perplexity. Yet the way was open to us if we chose, for strangely enough the river emptied freely into the sea with no raging bar to impede us. But it would have been madness to tempt the sea in our canoe. And the night was already falling ... Then all about us, with a paralysing urgency, and so loud as to seem at the very water's edge, the jungle broke abruptly into a renewed beating of drums.

“Oh damn!” Nick cried, “but there are no two ways about it, old boy,” and set to paddling again.

It was at that moment that we heard voices hailing us from the land: “Ahoy there! Ahoy!”

The drums ceased instantaneously as though rebuked.

Looking towards the shore, where it jutted out into a low headland thick with trees, we saw figures waving to us. One stood forward more prominently than the rest, gazing at us with a hand shading his eyes against the level glare of the sun. Suddenly he let out an oath, and plunging into the water came wading out towards us. “Swelp me Gawd!” we heard him cry.

“Old Sawny!” we shouted in a breath; and swinging the canoe to port we sent it leaping for the land.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

OLD SAWNY met us some way out in the water, and pushing behind the canoe ran us up the shore. Here we met Chapel, Fritz and Cocky. Fritz dragged us from the boat, and seizing us by the arms danced us round in an ecstasy. Cocky, on hands and knees and with smoke-grimed face, trying to blow some damp wood into flame, peered up and exclaimed, "Blimey, look wot the river's wash dahn nah!" Chapel stood by with arms folded until Fritz's subsiding effusions made it possible to slip in a greeting. Then drawing himself erect, his face in an amiable struggle after sternness, he held out a hand to us and said in his gentle voice, "Now that you have returned I think we may forget the past. You have behaved like gentlemen." Nick, letting out a vulgar monosyllable, promptly jabbed a fist in his paunch which doubled him up like a pair of compasses. Old Sawny meanwhile stood looking on with a leering benevolence, scratching his head slowly, and grunting from time to time, "I an't seed nothing to beat it. That I an't; swelp me Gawd!"

You can imagine that tumbling over one another on

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both sides with questions and explanations we were talking far into the night. It was a confusing way to piece together a story; particularly as Fritz in his joy at our return was continually breaking into some narrative with exclamations of delight, throwing his arms about our shoulders as we squatted round the fire and hugging us to him, and at the mention of our amorous exploits slapping us playfully on the knees with an "*Ach, geh weg!*" Chapel would expostulate mildly at such lack of decorum: "A gentleman should restrain his emotions," at which Cocky would break out with, "Nah ven, Chapel, don't set *your* old bells ringing, fer Christ's sake!" Indeed it wasn't until the others had succumbed to sleep and Old Sawny and I were left awake together that I really came to a clear understanding of the coincidence that had reunited us.

The *Jehovah*, I learnt—she was concealed at this moment in a creek across the river—had already made a journey to the Indies. There had been a short chase on leaving Molumbo, but my mates had soon given the slip to the pursuing cruiser, had made a rapid raid up the river here to complete the

load of slaves, and without further incident had reached the Indies, landing the slaves in Cuba, and returning, not to England as was customary, but direct to Molumbo for a fresh supply. But they found Molumbo in ashes.

At this point in his narrative Old Sawny eyed me rather strangely and cleared his throat with a significant grunt.

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“Yer see, Joey,” he said, “the Ole Man had set his heart on having yer back. He’s a tender spot in ’im somewheres that yer’ve managed to put a finger on. But when yer weren’t there, an’ not a soul to inform of yer whereabouts, an’ the place looking like it had seen the Day o’ Judgment, well, the Ole Man went fair crazy, he did an’ all; fair crazy, an’ that’s the holy truth! Fer it looked like wot yer’d made a meal fer them black fish, and there were one or two on us more had sore eyes; fer yer’ve a damned way with yer, Joey, of getting round a feller, a damned insinooating way. But there, the Ole Man after blowing off fer a bit like a blaspheming whale goes suddenly quiet. An’ away we sails, with the Ole Man on the poop looking like a image o’ death, staring straight afore ’im like wot he could see a ghost, an’ saying never a word. I tell yer, Joey, we spoke in whispers them days, an’ went about on the tips of our toes, we did an’ all, it struck us that pecooliar. So back we comes to where yer finds us now. Cannibal River, they calls this place. An’ a roaring factory there used to be here in the old days. But with the stopping o’ the trade it weren’t no longer safe. Fer yer’ve seed, there’s nothing ter hinder a govermint ship from creeping up in the night an’ dropping anchor in the road an’ sending along a landing party ter burn yer in yer bed, all cuddled up cosy, it’s more’n likely, with some damned black hussy. An’ fer honest folk, well, there’s something about the people here, something that an’t natural. There’ve been a deal as’ve tried it, but the people won’t

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never take to ’em. Won’t never trade, yer see. Scuttle off into the jungle, they do, at the sight of a white face; an’ yer’ll hear ’em all about yer, wailing an’ drumming, but yer’ll never see so much as a black nose of ’em. But some night there’ll come a scream as’ll frighten yer out of yer skin, and before yer can say ‘Jack’ there’ll be red hell all about yer, an’ that’s the last yer’ll know afore yer wakes in glory.—Yer can hear ’em at it now.”

I had for some while been conscious of a dull drumming, sounding out of the distance through Old Sawny's droning talk; but now it broke out without warning quite near at hand.

"They'll see our fire," I said.

"Yer've no need ter feel scared," Old Sawny assured me. "The fire'll tell 'em we an't asleep. An' they're afeared of us anyway, which an't surprising, fer we've treated 'em to an overdose o' powder these last days, a fair overdose o' powder, an' that's the holy truth! And wot's more, they always was a jumpy crew in these parts. Leastways, since Cap'n Andrew had the handling of 'em. Fer there's queer tales going o' Cap'n Andrew in these parts; trust me, son, mighty queer tales; though fer myself I could never rightly get the hang of 'em. But wot I do know—and 'cos why? 'cos I seed it—is as how he's spread the fear o' Gawd along this river, a hundred mile an' more he has, an' that's the holy truth! Year after year——"

"Yes," I interrupted, "I heard of all that at Molumbo."

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"Ah, yer've heard?" he repeated.

"But I didn't know this was the place," I said.

"Ay, this is the place," he went on. "Yer can lay on that, an' know yer money's safe. This is the place all right. But listen, son; this time it were different."

He gripped me by the knee, his face thrust into mine, showing bloated and disfigured in the fire-light.

"It weren't slaves he were after this time," he continued, speaking with a subdued hoarseness. "If it hadn't been that Mister Oslo looked to the interest o' the ship there wouldn't a been no slaves. But yer can rest easy; there's three hundred an' more on 'em aboard, all clapped under hatches an' snug in irons. Mister Oslo looked to that. But the Ole Man, no, it weren't slaves he were after this time.—It were blood!"

He drew back from me, grunting in his significant way, and repeating, "Blood!"

He was silent for a little, then added in a changed voice, "Seems to me I'm scaring yer. Seems to me I've spoken more'n I orter. But don'cher mind me. Let's have yer yarn, son."

"Well," I said, "as I've just come down the river I've seen too much for mere words to scare me."

“Of course,” he took me up, “yer’ve seed it all. I were forgetting that. Yer’ve seed it all. A hundred mile an’ more. An’ did yer see a village standing? Did yer for the matter o’ that see so much as a shack?”

“Not one,” I said.

“Why,” he went on, “that’s doing it thorough, an’t

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it now? An’ that’s wot the Ole Man done. An’ ’cos why? ’cos he thought they’d taken an’ murdered yer, Joey, an’ he were fer giving yer a prime funeral.”

I started alert in sharp dismay.

“Do you mean,” I cried, “that if he’d known I was alive——”

“Ah, if he’d a known that——” Old Sawny grunted. “But there, don’cher mind me.”

“And where’s Captain Andrew now?” I asked, I believe with some vague idea that I must immediately go and speak with him.

“Why, that’s wot none on us know,” he told me.

“You don’t know?” I repeated, not understanding him.

“Use yer reason, son,” he said. “Wot are we sitting here for when we might be snug in our berths? Do yer think it’s fresh air we’re after, or do yer think it’s the moon? Or perhaps ’cos we’re that fond o’ the mosquitos? Use yer reason, son. We’re waiting on the Ole Man.”

“But where is he then?” I asked again.

“See here, Joey,” Old Sawny began in the manner of one patiently explaining the obvious to a child. “We might have sailed two days agone. The ship were loaded, an’ the other work—why, that were done too. Then the Ole Man gets a craze to go fer a walk in the jungle. Orders a boat, he does, an’ cuts across here, an’ tells us to wait on him, an’ walks straight in. An’ Mister Oslo, he’s in a fair to do, he is an’ all. Fer with them black

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cattle stacked between decks, an’ their fellers piping to ’em from the jungle, wot with the feeding of ’em an’ the cleaning of ’em an’ the quieting of ’em when they starts into a holler, an’ yer never daring to open a hatch to give ’em a breath o’ air—yer sees how it is. But Mister Oslo an’t fer sitting here till the blessed trumpets sound, let me tell yer. We sails with the sun, Cap’n Andrew or no Cap’n Andrew, though wot’ll come on it who can reckon? Fer if the Ole Man an’t left his luck aboard—but there, it don’t

serve to paint the sky with clouds wot mayn't never come. Not but wot Cap'n Andrew, put him on the poop, an't worth fifty of Mister Oslo, as well I orter know. But two days, an' the ship charged as yer might say with powder in a land all squibs an' crackers, that calls fer summat to be done, an' sharp too, it does an' all. Fer with the Ole Man taken as he is, walking off into the jungle looking up it may be some ole sweetheart o' his, or perhaps it's the matter o' some treasure he'd laid by—but yer sees how it is, there an't no counting on him, fer by the look on his face, let me tell yer, it weren't no sweetheart he'd gone a-courting, an' it weren't no gold he'd gone a-hunting, but it were the Devil himself he were out to call on, to report, it's more'n likely, that he'd held to his bargain an' to ask fer his pay." "You're right!" I broke in. "Only it's the Devil who's held to his bargain, and the Captain who'll have to pay!"

The meaning of the drums was clear to me now.

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Old Sawny peered across at me with mouth agape. His imbecile incomprehension threw me into a rage.

"The forfeit of his soul!" I shouted at him. "Don't you understand?"

I was carried back in memory to that dark confession in the cabin, when the Captain staring at me across the table, his eyes dry and glittering, his face lit with madness, hissing at me through set teeth, "Something within me, something not yet purged away, something that whines to be back there, whines like a sick beast ..." I clapped my hands to my ears in an access of horror, for they were even now on his track, drumming him back to them, so that I expected momentarily to hear a scream telling that at last he had fallen a prey to that evil land.

"Sorry, son," Old Sawny was saying, "I thought I'd been speaking more'n I orter. But don'cher mind me. There'll be time yet fer a little sleep."

He curled himself up with his head on his arm, blinking at me with a guilty concern.

"All this talk!" he muttered. "But you lie down, Joey. Trust an ole man, it's the on'y way when the nerves get jumpy; the on'y way, swelp me Gawd! 'Cos haven't I had some, an' don't I know? But there, don'cher mind me."

With a final yawn he was asleep.

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CHAPTER FOURTEEN

AMID the tumult of my mind one thing was clear: the Captain was in deadly danger, and the only thing that could save him would be the knowledge that I was still alive. This I assumed as basic, never so much as suggesting to myself any argument against it. It was not that I rated his affection for me so highly that I imagined my supposed death would drive him to an act of despair, but that in his peculiar perturbation of spirit I knew I had come to symbolise for him some necessity without which life would be a chaos without light, without foundation, with no steering-mark, with no rallying-sign, a corruption, an enormity, given over utterly to evil. How such a conviction had grown in me I made no effort to understand; simply it was implicit in the circumstances of the whole dark drama. But what troubled me was, how to carry to him the information that would save him; and before the morning too, as otherwise, with Oslo determined to sail, it would be too late. For here I came up against my own cowardice. To follow him into the jungle, at night, haunted with those persistent drums...

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I told myself it would be madness, for I should never find him. Yet the excuse could not have satisfied me, for I fortified it with a darker reasoning. Was I even called upon to save him? Through him I was already so steeped in blood that I felt the clinging guilt of it as an uncleanness never to be purged away. The massacre of the slaves, the slaughter along the river, though human justice might have held me clear of them yet I felt their ugly burden as a weight of horror on my soul which no sophistry could alleviate or remove. And if the Captain should return I should never again be able to cut myself free of him, and what fresh frightfulness this might involve me in I shuddered to contemplate. Yet it was my desertion that had sent him ravaging up the river, that had brought him even now to the very edge of the Pit.

That was a consideration from which I could not escape. I circled in my bewilderment, wrestling against the obligation it imposed upon me, but I returned to it again and again. It was I who had driven the Captain into the jungle, and if I left him there...

Once I sprang up and shouted, "Captain Andrew! Captain Andrew!"

My voice had no resonance among the enclosing trees, muffled at my very lips as in a dream. Even the sleeping men about me did not stir.

I yielded to a blackness of resentment. Nothing mattered. For honour, compassion, justice, were the mere illusions of men, lost in a welter of darkness, and searching

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for a way that was not there by the glow of their own indignant pity. But the forces of evil were too strong, and righteousness—the curious phrase came back to me—was no more than a futile cutting across the grain....

The drums were drawing nearer again, closing in as it seemed upon one determined point, and beating with a more insistent rhythm.

They spoke no longer with a sorrowful inarticulation, but with a measured assurance. For there was one clear path cutting through all perplexity, the path that the Captain had taken, the path of surrender. I went down on my hands and knees and crept into the jungle, drawn as by a spell towards the drums.

I don't know how I advanced. Either I had struck a track, or the bush opened miraculously before me; for I was conscious of no impediment. And with the drums to guide me I needed no light. By day they had repelled me; but in the darkness there was a mastering compulsion in the very horror of their menace, intensified by the cadenced chant of the intoning voices, which caught at some primal passion of the blood so that the spirit responded in a terror of exultation. I lost all sense of myself, abandoned to the urgency of some monstrous consummation, intoxicated by some unnameable lust.

Except for one lucid moment I have no clear recollection of my progress. That was in a lull in the drumming, when I came sharply to the consciousness of the blackness about me, hemming me in with a tangle of obstructions through which I was blindly and laboriously crawling.

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For the instant I had no more comprehension of my position than if I had awaked to find I had been wandering in my sleep. I was taken in a wild panic. Then it came to me that I was seeking Captain Andrew. That steadied me; and I pushed myself upright and groped forward a step or two. But with the renewal of the drumming I was immediately on my knees again, advancing, but to no intelligent control. Captain Andrew might never

have existed for me, urged on by some insensate necessity which admitted of no question or dispute.

I could hear the drawn breath of the invisible chanters. I could hear the shuffle of feet. Of a sudden I was aware of a great light before me, of a circle of dark figures, pressed one behind the other, moving about a fire in a jigging dance, thumping time upon the earth with the butts of their spears. They passed almost within hand's reach of me, their eyes set, their faces expressionless, intoning some repetitive burden which by the incantation of its very monotony inflamed the nerves and drugged the will. It swelled and softened, yet with no relief in its relentless persistence, urgent with some passionate yet emotionless invocation. And throbbing through it were the drums which, though hidden from me, yet beat in time to my pulsing blood, maintaining a rhythm so mercilessly exact that the reason wilted before the spell of its perturbing importunity. My sight dizzyed, my hearing reeled. I crouched on the ground, my face buried in my hands, waiting for I knew not

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what, too crushed in spirit even to turn and creep away.

I became conscious of a change. I looked up. The dancing had ceased, and the men still chanting were squatting on their haunches swaying their bodies from side to side. I could see the drummers now, in a smaller circle within, sitting cross-legged with their drums between their knees. Their faces fixed in a rigid stare gave the impression of some mesmeric compulsion to the rise and fall of their tasselled sticks. But my glance at them was but momentary, for before the fire was a creature so overpoweringly atrocious that my gaze fastened upon it in a revolted fascination.

It stood perfectly motionless, huddled into itself, with legs as thin as canes protruding from a shapelessness of wisps and shreds like a dishevelled bird. But it was the face of the thing that dominated me. For the eyes ringed with white, the cheeks slashed with scarlet and ochre, the mouth flashing with pointed teeth and drawn into a grin which was both ecstasy and anguish, the shaven head too crested with feathers and sprouting at the temples with enormous horns, set as the creature was in a vault of shadow lit with leaping flames, gave it the appearance of something elemental, spiritual, an emanation of the primordial darkness vital with evil.

Then it began to move; slowly at first, with withered arms and claw-like fingers emerging from the tatters of its dress. And its legs stirred, and it turned upon itself with a stealthy pacing, drawing up its knees almost to its chin. But gradually it took on a fiercer animation.

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From somewhere it drew a switch of thongs and lashed itself across the shoulders, while the drums beat with a sharper tone and the encircling figures swayed more violently. Little by little the pacing grew into a capering. There were knives in its hands now, and it gashed itself as it leapt till it was streaming with blood. Then discarding the knives it clawed at itself with its nails, tearing visible channels down its cheeks, down its body, which through the rents in its bedragslements showed emaciated like a skeleton's with every bone distinct. Yet an amazing vigour informed it. The capering became a whirl of gyrating limbs, so dazzling in its rapidity as to bewilder the senses, and seemingly so beyond all human control that the creature appeared to have been caught into a vortex of raging winds. And the drums and the voices, though maintaining their same measured cadence, yet by some strange quality of enfuried excitation interpreted that motion into sound. There was no resisting the glamour of its hideous enchantment. It was appalling; it was exalting. For that agitation of lacerated wastage was instinct for me with the self-consuming frenzy that hungers at the heart of all existence, and before which life falls prostrate in a revel of self-immolation as before some fatal ferocity demanding the ultimate sacrifice of a spirit drained and spent.

What more frightful rites were yet to follow I could not conceive. But I should have yielded. It was inevitable.... Then through an opening in the bushes beside

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me, staring full upon me on a level with my own, I saw a face. A white face. It was Captain Andrew.

Immediately my mind sobered. This horror that had ensnared me was no more than the jungle at its ugly antics, this creature no more than its ministering priest. With the Captain found I remembered my mission. I was there to save him. And the very acuteness of the danger braced me back to resolution.

I put my finger to my lips, for the Captain had opened his mouth as though about to call my name. Then I reached out a hand and gripped him by the shoulder. For I could interpret without words the consternation on his face: he needed the assurance that I was no hallucination, no spectral visitor haunting him from the grave. Still fixing me with a wild stare he laid a hand on mine, feeling slowly up my arm, while I tightened my grip significantly. Then his eyes wavered; his face softened; he dropped his head.

I shook him; then turning I began to creep cautiously back upon my tracks. I looked behind me once to make sure that he was following. After this the darkness enclosed me, and I could no longer see him; but the stir of his passage and the sound of his breathing told me that he was pressing after.

It was impossible to retrace the path by which I had come. In a little I was struggling amid a network of thorns too obstinate to penetrate. I wrestled with the encumbrance, only to become the more engaged. I was unable even to back away, hopelessly entangled. I could

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hear the Captain behind me panting like a tired dog. The sound filled an emptiness of silence which was strangely troubling, till with a shock I realised that the drums had ceased. I realised too that the air was growing grey about me, involving the surrounding density in a pale film. The day was breaking.

From far off I could hear a measured chorus. I recognised it as a capstan chanty. They were warping the *Jehovah* out to sea.

Then suddenly the jungle rang with a single sharp scream.

It was taken up almost on the instant by a clamour of enraged wailing as of baffled beasts. The incantation had failed. The victim had escaped. But a surging in the undergrowth told of vengeance hungering on the trail.

The Captain pushed roughly past me, and shouldering full into the obstruction that had impeded me bulked vigorously through. And now it was he that led and I that followed. We advanced with an extraordinary rapidity, which showed that he was no novice in jungle ways. The passage opened before him as though to a charm, and I crept after as along a beaten path. Yet it was a terrifying ordeal. The pursuit, though not direct upon our line, drew ominously nearer, beating widely for the scent with a sustained

howling of such pitiless ferocity that the spirit wavered irresolute as though drained of hope.

It was a matter of time only before they would come

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upon our track. Then a sudden yell of malevolent triumph told us that they had struck it. Instantly the Captain sprang to his feet and shouted at the full stretch of his lungs, "*Jehovah* ahoy!" An answering cry of "Ahoy there!" and a single musket shot sounded unexpectedly close at hand. The Captain plunged ahead with redoubled energy, and I leapt in his wake, heedless of the barbed growths which slashed across my face. In a dozen paces we had broken clear with the water wide before us; and just backing free of the headland where I had left them were Old Sawny and his mates in a whale boat, hanging on their oars, with Nick standing in the stern, musket in hand. We splashed towards them, the Captain reaching a hand back for me and sending me at a heave headlong into the bows. At the same moment the jungle opened showing our enemies on the bank, screaming after us and brandishing their spears, with that creature of horns and paint immediately on our heels.

He set into a capering and shrieking, clearly urging on his followers to rush us down. In a trice they would have done so; but the Captain, still in the water, seized a harpoon from the boat, and swinging about hurled it with the full force of his tremendous strength straight at that gesticulating fury. It caught him in mid leap, piercing him just below the breast, and transfixing him to a tree with his feet a clear half fathom above the ground. For a moment the lean limbs worked in a convulsive flurry. Then the horned and crested head drooped

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awry, and the whole body in its futile hideousness fell limp and hung inert.

The yelling subsided on the instant to a wail of inexpressible lamentation, and the whole horde of our pursuers, as though stricken with a mortal despair, faded from our sight, reabsorbed into the jungle.

The Captain cut through the twine, and springing into the bows cried, "Let go, my hearties!"

The oars fell, and the boat nosed round to her course, making for the *Jehovah* where already clear of the estuary she was standing out to sea.

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PART THREE

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

ON BOARDING the *Jehovah* Captain Andrew assumed immediate command. A light breeze was blowing off the land, and all hands were set to hoisting the sails to it as though in an urgency to draw clear of that evil shore. We made a few miles, but the breeze gradually dwindled, at last dying away altogether, leaving us utterly becalmed. And the calm lasted for days, tethering us to the land as though by an invisible chain. At first it was merely exasperating, but it grew to be unnerving. Squall clouds banked up about the horizon, but were dissipated into the blue before they reached us. Cat's-paws scurried across the sea-line, but did not brush us by a fringe. It was as though we were under a spell.

Yet these were days, not of repose, but of harassing fatigue. Except for snatches of sleep Captain Andrew never went below. He passed the poop sniffing the air and studying the sky for the first promise of wind,

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sometimes coming to rest with his glass trained on the coast, gazing I knew at that impaled monstrosity that stared back from the headland as though mesmerising us to its own fixity, then waking from his abstraction he would swing round and roar out a sudden order for the yards to be trimmed to meet some imaginary breath. We leapt to his bidding, to be reviled for our tardiness, heaving at the ropes with a will though knowing our labour for unavailing, for the sails hung lifeless in the torpid atmosphere which seemed scorched to immobility beneath the brazen sky. And between our bouts of futile endeavour we crept into corners of shade, panting, drained of all energy, while the deck about us glowed like a furnace.

Yet there was little grumbling, even when we were tumbled from our bunks a dozen times in the night, for we were all in a fever to be gone, because intensifying the strain of delay was the growing restiveness of the slaves whose continuous groaning and wailing sounded beneath us like an undertone of menace. With the land still in view it was unsafe to bring them on deck, for the sight of their country would drive them into a madness, and shackled as they were they would throw themselves into the sea. Yet in their stifling prison, where they could not so much as stand upright, and where the floor space permitted them only to lie pressed together like logs,

it was becoming increasingly difficult to maintain order. Indeed this was only possible by means of a guard whom Oslo had chosen from among

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their own number. These belonged to some inland tribe, being prisoners of war, and so could be trusted with their freedom, because escape would mean recapture by their enemies; moreover finding themselves in authority over their late captors they were savagely content. They were distinguished from the naked wretches below by red cotton trousers, which they flaunted with immense pride; and they were armed with short whips, which they were not backward to use. Twice a day they distributed food and water among the other slaves, attended to such cleansing as was possible, and for the rest kept watch about the hatches, which were thrown open for ventilation, lashing the slaves back from crowding to them, and forcing them to their places, as otherwise half the cargo would rapidly have perished of suffocation. For the reek about the hatchways, rising in a visible steam, came fetid and nauseating as from caged beasts, and the heat must have been appalling. It is little wonder that the slaves were goaded into fighting among themselves, startling us with sudden frightful screams which would be followed on the instant by an uproar of infuriated outcries. On such occasions the guard plunged below, slashing right and left till the tumult was quelled. They would emerge at length with whips dripping with blood, and dragging after them, more likely than not, two or three of the wounded to be patched up by Plasters in his hospital under the fo’c’sle, or it might be a corpse to be tossed into the sea. Yet for us more disturbing than these animal outbreaks

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was that ceaseless plaint which haunted us day and night, pervasive and ubiquitous, as though the very vessel were taken with a fever.

I had anticipated with a certain shrinking my return among my mates, but with the incessant toil at the ropes I slipped naturally back to my place as though I had never been absent. Moreover in their uneasy preoccupation my companions were not concerned with my adventures, showing only by a rare comment or question an indifferent interest. Such talk as there was—for we slept heavily in our short periods of relief—was for our common predicament. Yet in a way I found myself the centre of a peculiar confidence. There was a growing perturbation, fostered by Cocky, on

account of that wanton slaughter up the river, but though in the fo’c’sle he was laughed or shouted down yet odd hints dropped to me in moments of more private confession showed that his querulous nonsense was affecting his fellows more deeply than they cared to betray.

They were vague enough to begin with, these suggestions of unrest: “The wind don’t come, Joey; it ain’t natural somehow. Black magic, may be, if yer were fool enough to believe in sich things.” But after some days the talk became more pointed. As a particular instance, one afternoon as I was squatting in the scant shade of the galley, Dusty drew up to me and sat down at my side, and without preliminaries put to me the question direct: “What do you make of it all, Joey?”

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He smiled at me in a kindly nervous way, but his thin face was drawn and his eyes wide with anxiety.

“We’re in the doldrums, aren’t we?” I replied, on the defensive.

He laughed shortly.

“We are that,” he said, “and we seem likely to stay there. But what’s it that’s keeping us? Because, you know, Cocky’s right in a way; it was a real cruel business, Joey, and I felt at the time we should have to pay for it some day. But—what’s the weather got to do with a matter like that? How can the killing of a few niggers keep the wind from blowing? It’s silly.” He sniggered like a man uncertain of himself. “Yet damme,” he added, “it’s all mighty queer. I don’t understand it.”

I let him talk, but though I had convictions of my own I preferred to say nothing.

Presently Papa joined us, hugging up his long legs out of the sun. He leaned heavily towards me, nudging my arm, and winking laboriously said, “We shall see things yet.”

“Haven’t we seen enough already?” I asked.

“A sight too much,” Dusty broke in; “and that’s just the trouble.”

Papa thrust out a long neck, regarding Dusty on the other side of me with eyes of ponderous solemnity beneath bushy brows.

“You mean,” he said, in his manner of crude innuendo, “that the Old Man went a step too far.”

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He composed himself with his back rigid against the galley, and fell to nodding his head.

“Well, I don’t like it, I don’t like it,” Dusty suddenly exclaimed. “And here’s Joey; he doesn’t like it either, if he’d only speak the truth. Because you’ve seen things too, Joey,—back there—haven’t you now?”

“I’ve seen some very ugly things,” I answered. “And I want to wash my hands of them.”

“Ha! wash your hands! wash your hands!” Dusty repeated, surveying his own with unseeing eyes. “That’s about it. Wash your hands——”

Such talk was inconclusive, but its meaning was clear. Yet that same night in the fo’c’sle when Cocky began again with his, “Lumme, it’s time sumfink were done; sacrifice, or sumfink uv that,” Dusty and Papa joined in the general chaff against him, seemingly as sceptical as Nick himself.

However, as the days drew changelessly on Cocky in the energy of his fear became impossible to suppress. Derision turned to anger, but his shrill voice dominated the outcries he invoked, till at length he was allowed to rant himself out with only an occasional protesting “Stow it, fer Christ’s sake!” or a boot thrown at his head. But one night he became more challengingly outspoken. “There’s a Jonah on this ship, that’s wot it is,” he declared defiantly. As the remark passed without comment he broke into a gabble of repetitions to taunt us from our obstinate silence. “There’s a Jonah on this ship, I tell yer; though ye’re such ignerant swabs that

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yer ain’t never heard uv Jonah, I shouldn’t wonder. But there’s a Jonah on this ship, and the sooner he’s throwd to the sharks the better it’ll be fer the rest uv us, it will an’ all.”

“You mean the whales, surely,” Chapel corrected politely, at which Cocky shouted, “Garn, don’cher be so bloody clever. Yer’ll hurt yer head, boy, finking fings aht like that.”

In other days this would have occasioned a jolly uproar, but now it roused no response. Cocky ran on with his banal chatter, but the figures on the bunks lay impassive as though sunk in stupour. Yet the persistent nonsense was irritating like a tormenting mosquito, and I believe it was a relief to us all when Pips at last interrupted.

“Say,” he asked in his slow way, “this Jonah you talk about, can you name him?”

“Think I’m afraid, eh?” Cocky retorted. “Well, I ain’t afraid, let me tell yer, but I ain’t naming him neither just ter please yer, ’cos yer knows who I mean.”

“Sounds to me like mutiny,” Nick chipped in.

There was a low growl at this, and heads were raised.

“Scared! that’s wot ye are, scared!” Cocky shouted, triumphant at having roused us. “Scared like a lot uv blinking hens! Blimey, yer ain’t got the spunk uv a lousy rabbit, not among the lot uv yer, yer ain’t! Scared!”

“See here, young un,” Old Sawny began, “if it’s the Ole Man ye’re referring to——”

“I ain’t mentioned no names,” Cocky broke in, “an’

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yer can’t say I ’ave, so yer needn’t try an’ come it on me like that.”

“But we all know who you mean,” Pips said.

“Then why don’cher do sumfink?” Cocky challenged him. “Taking it all lying dahn, that’s wot ye are; taking it all on yer backs like a lot uv damn whores ’cos ye’re paid fer it, that’s wot ye are. Yer knows wot’s wrong as well as I do, but ye’re all too scared ter speak, let alone do sumfink. An’ here we are, an’ nuffink’ll never budge us till we do sumfink ter budge ourselves, let me tell yer.”

“Sacrifice, or sumfink uv that,” Pips suggested.

But the jibe rang false. In that long apartment, lit dimly by a single guttering candle, and pervaded from below by the moaning of the slaves, Cocky’s absurd little figure huddled round-backed on the bunk, with his white childish face, his round eyes and dishevelled hair, his piping voice aggressive and hysterical, imaged so ludicrously the fear in our own hearts, that we lay and watched him, held in spite of ourselves by his ridiculous eloquence, mastered by its sincerity of terror.

“I tell yer,” he screamed at us, “I knows abaht them black heathen. They can do things wot we can’t. I’ve met men wot’s seen things, and so I knows. Lumme, an’ this is on’y a beginning. An’ if yer don’t git up and do sumfink yer’ll see wot’s ter foller. Yer can’t play games wiv them black heathen, not wivaht yer pays fer it. Yer might uv known when yer heard all them drums. Knocking up the Devil, that was; an’ if yer fink yer can play

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hanky-panky wiv the Devil there's a lot uv sense yer ain't got yet. He knows wot he wants and he'll 'ave it. An' if yer don't give it him quiet he'll take it in his own way. An' you, Joey Brahn," he suddenly turned on me, "you ran away once, didn'cher, 'cos yer was scared? Then wot'cher wan'cher come crawling back fer when yer wasn't arster? An' wot'cher wan'cher go digging the Ole Man aht uv the jungle fer, yer damn silly meddling little swab? That were his funeral, weren't it? An' nah it'll be ours. I ain't fooling yer; I'm just telling yer."

He was well nigh sobbing.

"See here, young un," Old Sawny interposed conciliatingly. "Yer've got it all wrong, you trust an ole man. It an't your funeral, an' it an't mine. You an' me's under orders, an't we? An' a man under orders must do as he's bid. That's reason, an't it? So you rest easy, son, and git ter sleep. That's the best medicine I knows fer these like troubles, it is an' all. Sleep's the best medicine, swelp me Gawd!"

This specious sop to conscience was an immediate sedative. With grunts of satisfaction the men composed themselves again on their bunks. Even Cocky after a final "Well, yer can't say I ain't told yer," curled himself under his blanket and fell silent.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

THE NIGHT was by no means ended for me yet. When we went on deck at the changing of the watch it was my turn to go to the wheel. Monsieur Louis was on the poop. He gave me the course, and added, "But you'll not bring her round to it without magic."

The truth was that with no steerage way on her the ship swung about to every current, entirely independent of the helm. Yet almost mechanically, seeing the ship wide of her course, I put the wheel over; but without result.

"Ha, you have great faith," Monsieur Louis sneered.

I felt it peculiar that he should-speak to me in this way. Oslo in moments of expansion would explode some gross jest with the deck hands, but Louis always held aloof, not, I think, in disdain, though his manner might have suggested it, but rather as though the medium of intercourse between his world and ours were lacking. Yet now as he stood beside me, hands behind back, rising and falling on his toes, a neat dapper little figure, with clear-cut features presented to me in profile, and dark eyes which glittered to the binnacle light set

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seemingly on the horizon, he appeared to be inviting me to a guarded familiarity.

As I made him no answer he repeated, though without turning his face to me, "I observed that you had great faith."

His tone commanded a reply.

"Faith can move mountains," I said.

His lips twitched in amusement.

"But it would be more to our purpose," he replied, "if it could move ships."

I took it that in his ennui he wanted the refreshment of a little bantering dialogue. I even felt a certain pity for him, for in a flash I could see his loneliness, for his closest affinity on that ship must be the abstract intellectualism of Plasters.

"Monsieur," I said, "I am not a doctor of divinity, but without faith no ships would ever put to sea."

"Do you mean faith," he asked, "or observation?"

“In the first instance, faith,” I declared.

“In the first instance stupidity, in the first instance vanity, in the first instance greed,” he countered. “But faith—” he shrugged his shoulders. “Faith is a monster,” he continued. “Its father is fear, and its child is magic. Where there is faith there is darkness and there is blood, for out of it come religions and revolutions, and these, though their talk is of a new heaven and a new earth, yet their practice is of a very ancient hell. But do you begin to understand me?” he asked, facing me at last with a rather supercilious air.

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“I understand you very well,” I told him, “because I have seen what you only talk about.”

“Indeed,” he replied, smiling on me with an obvious delight, “yet you are not among the emancipated.”

“Because I have faith in other things,” I said.

“Ah,” he replied with a mock sadness, “that’s a pity. For to believe nothing, that is best. You may not be very happy, but you will not be very unhappy; and you will certainly be wise. The world is full of men of faith, and their presence is agitating. Your friends in the fo’c’sle—I can read it in their eyes—are disturbed with innumerable hallucinations. And our worthy captain,” he turned from me, finishing his phrase as he strolled away to lean over the taffrail, “has such faith that he has harpooned a continent.”

He had had his amusement and he had launched his *mot*, and now he had no further use for me.

For want of occupation I stood idly swinging the wheel, but the compass needle didn’t stir, and the stars blazed motionless overhead.

A heavy measured pacing behind me told me that the Captain had come on to the poop. I had had no speech with him since returning to the ship. Indeed I had taken every means to avoid him, being nervous of what he might draw me to say, and I remained now without movement hoping that in his preoccupation he would not notice me. But when he came to an abrupt halt a few steps from me and stood, as I felt, intently regarding me, I knew I could escape him no longer. I waited

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for him with the sense of having been run to earth after a tortuous chase.

His first words confirmed the impression. He strode up to me, and laying a hand on my shoulder said, "You, Joey—so I've found ye at last."

"Yes sir," I replied, but without turning to him.

"And that is all ye have to say to me?" he asked.

"Yes sir," I repeated.

I was gripping the wheel, I remember, and had my eyes set on the compass as though holding the ship to her course through a driving gale.

His fingers tightened on my shoulder, and he shook me a little.

"Ye will not speak to me, and ye will not look at me," he said, "though when I was lost ye came to me and delivered me."

"May God forgive me!" I replied.

He withdrew his hand as though I had stung him, and exclaimed on a deep intake of breath, "Ye're hard, boy, hard."

Yet I was aware of myself as wrung with compassion. The hard man was Monsieur Louis who believed nothing, and who now, balanced against the rail, was watching us amusedly, putting our words, I could feel, to the test of his emancipated scepticism.

I said in Spanish, "We are not alone."

The Captain turned his head slowly towards Louis, who straightened to the regard as though to some hypnotic compulsion; but he did not dismiss him. In his

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absorption or his disdain he left him standing there, a cynical comment on our confidences.

"This won't do, Joey," the Captain began again. "It isn't human nature to scorn the man ye help. To save a fellow creature binds ye to him with ties beyond love itself. And ye know well enough ye saved me—saved me from the Pit."

"It happened so," I told him. "I was following the drums."

"The drums!" he repeated in a whisper. Then suddenly he shouted. "Ye too, boy! Ye too!" and broke into a mirthless laughter.

That gave him matter for meditation, for he recommenced his pacing, slapping his thigh, thumping his breast, chuckling and exclaiming, like a man savouring the relish of some unholy jest. Once he stopped to throw at me, "So now ye understand, eh? Ye understand?" which somehow brought that earlier phrase of his to my mind, "It's the darkness that clears the eyes." But it was some minutes before he came finally to rest, doing so

with the abrupt question, "Boy, have ye heard the drums since—since that night?"

"No sir," I answered, realising for the first time their strange silence.

"They will not sound again," he declared. "Baffled! Baffled! For whatever ye may have had in mind, lad, it was the Lord who was working through ye. And now," he cried with a savage triumph, "the evil thing is dead!"

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"The evil thing is alive," I contradicted him quietly.

"It is dead!" he thundered at me.

"It is alive," I repeated; "and it is on this ship."

"Ye say things to anger me!" he shouted. "There's a cussed contrariness in ye, Joey Brown, and ye say things to anger me. I tell ye, the evil thing is dead!"

"I have heard it said of you," I told him, "that you have harpooned a continent."

He gave a sharp grunt, and swung round to gaze at the featureless shadow of the shore-line across the star-lit water. But he made no answer, remaining for some time without speaking, except that once I heard him mutter, "Children of Ham! Children of Ham!"

When at last he again became articulate it was to ask, "Can ye smell any wind, boy?"

So unmoving was the air that the only smells that came to me were of the ship, an accumulated savour of days, with the healthy faint tang of tarry cordage persistent through an atmosphere heavy with food, breath, perspiration, and emanating from below that reek of animal uncleanness which caught at the gorge with a menace of retching.

"I can smell the slaves," I replied.

That surprised an oath from him; but it subsided to a sigh.

"Joey," he said kindly, "I want ye to tell me your story."

"I have nothing to tell," I answered.

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"Then begin at the beginning and tell it," he commanded me in a manner not to be denied.

I made the narrative as brief as I could, and he listened without interruption, looking steadily down at me with arms folded high on his

breast, nodding his head at times, emitting profound grunts of confirmation or understanding, lifting a hand occasionally to draw slowly at his beard. I might have been confessing to a priest.

When I came to an end he drew an immense breath.

“Ay,” he said, “and so ye came back to me; ye came back, as I said ye would. And when I saw ye in the darkness, just the face o’ ye, with the finger to your lips, it was like meeting with my own conscience. The ghost of my conscience, for it was dead, and I was a lost man.” Then laying his hand again on my shoulder he said gently, “But ye have suffered, boy.”

“I didn’t mean to suggest that, sir,” I cried impulsively.

“No—no——” he said. “Ye were anxious for me to know that ye had behaved badly. Ye were always the coward; ye were always the palterer; ye were always the weakling; ripe and ready for every snivelling temptation. But I understand that kind of story. Ye have suffered more than ye care to tell, and that’s put a case about ye; but within, ye’re all the tenderer at the heart, boy.”

Tears gushed to my eyes; and a raging desire possessed

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me to fling myself headlong at Monsieur Louis, who chose this moment deliberately to turn his back upon us, and hurl him into the sea.

The Captain was again sniffing the air.

“You’ll never get a wind,” I cried angrily, “till you return the slaves to their own country and break with this foul business forever.”

“There ye speak like a fool, Joey,” the Captain shouted back with equal heat. “I sent ye to learn wisdom, and ye come back to me a fool.”

“Have you ever read of Achan?” I asked.

“Have ye ever read of Og?” he retorted. “Smite! Destroy! Hew in pieces! It is the vengeance of the Lord!”

“Yet there is no wind,” I said, looking round at the unflecked heaven above, ablaze with vigorous and crowding stars.

“It will come,” he declared.

“Not until——” I began; but he roared me down, “I will not hear of it! I will not hear of it!”

“Then there is another way,” I said, “for there is a Jonah on this ship, and you must throw him overboard if you would be free.”

“Are ye mad?” he asked.

I don't think I was mad, yet I was in a ferment of fury, for Cocky's pitiable parody of the truth shrilled mockingly in my head.

"Jonah," I forced myself to speak calmly, "that is

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another name for conscience. If I am your conscience, Captain Andrew, you must choose between me and the evil thing."

He seemed slow to absorb my meaning.

"So—so——" he said at length, speaking huskily, "lose ye, lose ye a second time! I dare not; I dare not, Joey. A second time!—Boy!" he seized me fiercely with both hands, shaking me in his emotion, constraining me by the force of his terror to gaze into his agonised eyes: "Didn't I lose ye once, and where did I stray to without ye? Where did ye find me? Where did it hail to, that path? Are ye still so dull? Is the truth still dark t' ye? Must I put a name to it to satisfy your scorn? Without ye I was a lost man; can't that content ye?—Lost!—Lost!"

His eyes burnt into mine as though to penetrate me, with understanding of the secret he dared not utter. I was faint with the pain of his grip upon my shoulders, but I answered him with what steadiness I could: "Yes, they were waiting for you—and the fire was ready."

"The fire!" he retorted slowly. "The fire! Ye dark-witted little fool! The fire was ready—but not for my flesh. They were waiting for me—but not for my blood! They drummed to me, drummed to me out of the darkness—d' ye think they were drumming for a victim? They were drumming for a king!—A king!—And can ye see me at it, Joey? The horns and the feathers, the whips and the knives! Smelling out the innocent thing

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to sate the gods of carnage! The sacrifice, the feasting! The smell of fire, the smell of flesh, mouths dabbled in blood, and the sinews clinging to the ragged bones!— Can ye see me at it? Is it clear to ye yet? I can picture it for ye in other shapes—lust and hate and terror——"

"You are hurting me," I said.

His fingers relaxed a little, and he drew in his breath as though once again I had stung him; but with a sorrowful resignation in his manner now, yet with an infinite yearning.

"Ye are obstinate, Joey," he said, "ye do not choose to understand. But this ye shall get," and his passion returned to him, "ye have come back to

me, and now ye bide with me. Ye bide with me to the end!”

What more might have passed between us I don’t know, for while he still held me, gazing at me with the eyes of a famished beast, I heard above the moaning of the slaves the rattle of a block, the shuffle of a sail, sounds so light that they did not penetrate the Captain’s reverie, yet at that moment so surprising that they startled me like a clap of thunder. At the same time I became aware of an added odour to the laden atmosphere, the sour rank odour of river mud and decaying vegetation. My eyes went sharply to the land. Not two minutes since the sky had been clear, yet now a great space of stars was blackened out with cloud. “Look, sir!” I cried, struggling to free myself and pointing across the water. “The wind!”

A single glance was sufficient for the Captain.

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“Stand by!” his voice boomed over the ship. “Mister Louis, all hands on deck, and look sharp, sir!”

In a trice the *Jehovah* came to life.

With the first preliminary puff I put the helm over, and the ship, answering to the strain with creaking ropes and timbers, gathered steerage way and headed slowly round to her course. Yards were squared, and hardly was the last rope belayed before the squall burst upon us full astern. It was dawn before its fury abated; and during those hours of violence, with the air in a howl about me and the deck a torrent beneath my feet, I clung flattened against the wheel with my eyes set desperately upon the compass. But braced as I was to my task in an unquestioning singleness of purpose I was yet in a rage of revolt, for more tormenting than the smother of the pooping waves and the horizontal lash of the rain was the shattering negation of my prophetic warnings. I felt it like a betrayal, so swiftly had it followed upon my words, and so ironically ordered that it was I myself who was chosen to steer the ship in her flight from that magnetic shore.

With the coming of the sun the wind fell away and the sky cleared, and by noon there was scarcely breath enough to stir the sails. But it mattered nothing now, that we were threatened with a further calm. We were free of the land, and its shadow no longer lay over the ship. The men went about their work with renewed spirits. Papa’s winks suggested that he had known all

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along how it would be, Dusty's face was wreathed in insane smiles, and Cocky chirped like a sparrow.

But the gaiety was premature. Towards evening the look-out startled us with the cry of "Sail ho!" Full in our course was a ship dimly discernible on the skyline. It still lay there in the morning, too distant for its nature to be determined, yet to our anxious scrutiny ominously significant.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

DURING the daytime now we could admit the slaves on deck. At their first appearance they came up inconceivably fouled, wasted almost to skeletons, and with eyes blinking at the light. Peering about them, and finding themselves isolated in an emptiness of sea, they set up a lamentable screeching, tearing at their hair, beating on their breasts, and, many of them, throwing themselves to the deck and grovelling there in an abandonment of despair. We brought them up under the native escort in batches of twenty. They were immediately submitted to a thorough ablution—they were entirely naked—and then with long chains passed through their fetters were secured to ring-bolts around the deck, where finally their nails were pared to the quick and their heads shaved. The women and children, who all this while had been locked into the great cabin, were allowed their freedom, though they too were denied any vestige of clothing, and were washed, scrubbed and shaven with the same vigorous scrupulousness as the men. On the first day this was well nigh' a morning's

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work, but thereafter, the initial cleansing once accomplished, it was sufficient merely to douse the slaves with a bucketful of water a-piece as they emerged from below.

It was the bo'sun's duty to supervise the cleaning of the between-decks, but somehow on this first occasion it devolved on Plasters. There were some dozen boys among the cargo, and these were allotted to him as a working party. They emptied the brimming buckets and scoured them with boiling water, holy-stoned the flooring, and washed it over with vinegar. But the poison of that reeking atmosphere was more than they could endure. They were obliged to return at intervals to recuperate in the fresh air. Occasionally one was thrust up through a hatch in a swoon, and another would clamber out to collapse vomiting on the deck, where the guard would set about him with their whips. By the time they had finished they were all of them in a daze and came up reeling as though from a bout of fever. Yet Plasters seemed immune. He showed no hurry to be quit of his task. When he appeared, as he did at times, at one of the hatches, it was not for air, but merely with a mild request that some absconding youth should

be hunted down and returned to duty; and at the end, as he stumbled up the ladder and shuffled away to report to the bo'sun, there was no trace of disgust on his loose lips, no sign of nausea in his vacant face.

There was plenty of work for him in these days, as

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hardly a slave was free of scratches, chafes and galls, many of which were already desperately festered and threatening gangrene. In his unhurrying and absent way Plasters would make his rounds, washing, cupping, applying ointments. I liked to attend him, learning what I could of his craft, for frequently at Molumbo I had found myself at a loss for want of a rudimentary knowledge of physic and surgery. Yet I am uncertain to this day whether I was fortunate in my teacher, for Plasters based his theory of healing, not on "the superstitious lore of the herbalists," but on his own curious philosophy. Health was merely an indication that the body was "in the grain," happiness being its spiritual counterpart. Disease like discontent was a sign of the presence of some poison. Medicine therefore was summed up for him in the word emetic; even surgery too, for the lancet was no more than an emetic for the blood. Moreover, as he argued that the body had been adapted to live in the sun and the air, it followed that the sun and the air were the best curatives, and his practice was to leave all wounds unbandaged during the day-time, covering them at night only to prevent irritation. Some of the wounds were so shocking that I protested against such exposure, at which, in an access of perfectly childish enthusiasm, he declared that he would put the theory to the test of experiment. Accordingly some of the patients were bandaged; and I must confess that these were slower to recover. Plasters was beside himself with rapture, for though his art was a practical one, yet so completely

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did he live in a world of abstractions that up to this moment I am certain it had never occurred to him that there might be any correlation between practice and theory.

A further incident I must record. Snuff Plasters also considered as an emetic, an emetic for the lungs, and as the slaves were brought on deck each morning he submitted them to strong doses which threw them into violent fits of sneezing, the purpose being to clear them of the unclean atmosphere of the night. Yet I always suspected a more preposterous

motive, for so puerile was Plaster's conception of the amusing that the sight of the slaves, abandoned in utter helplessness to their paroxysms of sneezing, their faces streaming with mucus and tears, would set him spluttering with laughter. And one day the fit spread through the whole ship. For an hour or more we were all of us at it, shrilling and trumpeting according to our individual manners, as though engaged in some lunatic concert. We simply sat down and gave ourselves up to it, waiting for a breath of wind to clear the air. Bungs, I remember, emitted the absurdest little snorts for such a great round fellow, whereas Oslo made the deck resound with rending explosions. Louis hung over the taffrail, holding discreetly to his nose, but from time to time we saw his shoulders heave and knew that for all his aristocracy he was subject to our own affliction. The Captain retired below. It was inconceivably ridiculous, yet in a way alarming too; for we had no control of the ship or of the slaves. But the

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epidemic passed, and Plaster was forthwith forbidden this particular method of purgation, at least while the calm held. Yet that was not the secret of the matter, as I learnt later. For Plaster confided in me, with childish triumph, that it was a sneezing powder of his own which he had scattered about the ship, and he wanted me to participate in a further experiment. I didn't expose him; but I let him know in a burst of indignation how I considered his philosophical sportiveness, and for some days I refused to associate with him. For this was no time for such tomfoolery, as all this while, you must remember, that sail of unknown portent still lingered on the horizon.

Slobbers became a man of importance in these days. The responsibility of cooking for three hundred or more slaves twice in the day was exasperating to his uncertain nerves. It was dangerous to cross him, for a word would throw him into a gesticulating jabber and send him leaping for his axe. The slaves feared him—or possibly revered him—as a visible demon, and the more timid would fall prostrate and knock their foreheads on the deck as he passed. Such an impression was easily understandable. As he presided at the try-pots—which served admirably to cook the slaves' messes in—his lips in a slaver, his eyes a-stare, his face a brilliant scarlet from the fire, he had the appearance of a ferocious wizard about his cauldrons stirring at some monstrous brew.

The slaves were fed morning and evening. They were

divided into groups of ten, and disposed about a “kid” of rice or yams, which was passed around the circle, though they were provided with individual spoons. The bo’sun was in charge of the performance. No slave could eat till he had given the signal, and on the signal to cease must stop on the instant. The native guard were dispersed about the deck to enforce obedience with their whips. Moreover they had to be alert, not merely to restrain gluttony, but to detect deliberate starvation. A slave who refused to eat was fed forcibly, not to say violently; and if his loss of appetite were genuine he was relegated to Plasters. Water, and even tobacco, was allowed them in the same regulated way. The pipes were circulated like the “kids,” each man being permitted three whiffs.

Care was taken to keep the slaves, not only healthy, but happy. Though to begin with they were chained about the deck, yet as they became resigned to their surroundings more and more of them were given their freedom; and the women were free from the first. In the evenings too they were encouraged to dance and sing, and for an hour or so the ship was in a clamour of drumming and twanging and chanting. Shortly before sundown the women were locked into the great cabin, and the men arranged in their places below. I say “arranged,” because they could not be trusted docilely to retire to their beds. For one thing they were always in a heat of excitement after the dancing and singing; but chiefly their beds were so confined that

they would fight like beasts for every inch of space. You must imagine them when arranged as lying on their sides, pressed body to body in a double row down the vessel, their knees tucked up to allow of others in the space between. Once settled it was impossible to move a limb. Yet to effect this meant an hour’s infuriated battling, the guard busy all the while with their whips. It meant, too, fresh work for Plasters, who, incidentally, contrary to custom, insisted on their lying on their left sides. This he declared was better for the heart as it eased it of the pressure of gases from the stomach. Finally, for a surer safeguard, they were shackled two and two. This I always considered as unwise, for those who wished to use the buckets during the night were obliged to drag their companions with them. This always occasioned a quarrel, if not a fight; and as a matter of fact they

found it simpler to ease themselves where they lay, which added to the foulness of their prison.

Such then was the daily routine; but meanwhile we lay motionless upon the ocean, with that unknown ship still visible on the horizon to question our passage when at last the wind should come.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

ONE morning showed her nearer to us. There had been the merest movement of air during the night, enough to set the sails idly flapping, but not enough to shift us, yet the space between the two vessels had lessened appreciably. She was still too distant for her nature to be discerned by the naked eye, but the Captain studied her through his glass, perched in the crow's nest for the better part of an hour, and when he returned to the deck his face was by no means reassuring. The rumour was soon abroad that the ship was a British cruiser. We had all secretly suspected this from the beginning, and were ready to believe it at the first whisper. Cocky's panic was immediately all alive again, so that the fo'c'sle was once more shrill with his puerile taunts. We chaffed and cursed him as before, but when on the following morning we found the cruiser had crept still closer to us we could not conceal our concern.

That day the slaves were kept below, which was confirmation, if we needed any, of the Captain's fears. A sharp look-out was kept from the mast-head on the

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chance of a boarding-party being sent to examine us, and arms and ammunition were laid ready about the deck. It was clearly the Captain's intention if necessary to fight the ship, and I remembered that old warning of his—if we were taken it would be a hanging matter, and the ship was in a state of war.

The morning dragged away in an atmosphere of strained expectation. No watch went below, but we all gathered in the bows, when not engaged on any duty, saying little enough, but with eyes eagerly alert for movements on the cruiser. As it became less and less likely that we were to be subjected to any inquisition the strain relaxed. Chatter broke out, reminiscences of other such alarms, speculations on the probable outcome of armed resistance. My mates, I came to realise, simple docile fellows as they were, were resolved not to hang while any hope lay in fighting. Indeed, if faith were to be put in words, there was a core of stubbornness in those men, a hardness, even a ferocity, which surprised me.

Nick was by my side most of the day, and somehow Pips had attached himself to us. Nick, curiously enough, showed little eagerness for the threatened battle. "Killing your own folk," he exclaimed more than once, "that's not my idea of fun." Pips lost something of his slow drawl, and with it his customary whimsical detachment. His boyish lips took on a rather unpleasant curl, and his dreamy eyes had a glitter in them. He had

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a cutlass and a couple of pistols in his belt, and had set three loaded muskets in a row against the bulwark, together with a store of shot and powder. He watched these with a jealous possessiveness, and when called away on duty would return as soon as he was free to make sure that they had not been moved. "When the fight begins," he warned me, "you'll kindly remember that these are mine, Joey. There'll be time to reload, so I can reckon on six. And if they try to get aboard," —he tapped his pistols— "another couple. That'll thin them out quite considerably. Only you can't count on all hands to do the like. They'll get excited and shoot over their heads. You keep cool, Joey, and aim low; and keep your pistols till they're on you. You must shoot to kill."

"I probably shan't shoot at all," I told him.

"Then you're a damned little fool," he retorted. "If they get you, you'll swing. And that won't do you much good."

Nick broke in with a tempersome oath. "It isn't natural," he cried. "Why can't they leave us alone?" He launched petulantly into a stream of coloured epithets.

"It's likely they don't see eye to eye with us in this matter," Pips replied. "It's likely too that it amuses them."

"Press-gang slaves!" Nick exclaimed. "They're no freer than the niggers, and they have a deuced harder

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time. It's all bloody hypocrisy! If we could shoot the people who put them there—their own countrymen too——"

"Well," Pips returned to something of his usual manner, "they're paid to be killed."

However, no boat was lowered from the cruiser, and for that day at least we were safe. But the Captain was taking no further risks. The next morning might show us the cruiser right upon us, consequently he resolved

on a manœuvre which I for one had not anticipated. This was to tow the ship clear during the night. A couple of boats were manned and lowered, and attached by cables to the ship. The anchor was weighed. And working in relays we laboured all through the night. The toil was exhausting; but with the morning we found ourselves once again in an empty sea.

The Captain was not yet satisfied. But now that the danger was over, the work could be shifted on to the slaves. This was not possible before, because though they were expert with the paddle they knew nothing of the oar, so first they had to be taught how to row. The better part of the morning was wasted in this way, for they were incredibly clumsy. But by noon parties had been chosen and allotted to the boats, each party being provided with two of the native guard and a couple of hands armed with cutlasses and pistols, and once again the ship was under way. We understood that this was to continue until the cruiser had been circumvented. This would be a matter of some days; but sluggishly

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as we moved, at least we were making some advance; moreover we were safe again, and at any moment the wind might come.

What came first, however, was a sudden alarm from one of the boats. Cries and pistol shots broke out simultaneously, and before we could well know what was happening we saw a whole boat's crew in struggling confusion. A body or two was tumbled into the sea, and the next moment the boat had been cut adrift, and the slaves seizing the oars were making a desperate bid for freedom. They whooped in triumph as though their escape was already secured; but they rowed entirely without unison, in their excitement plunging the blades deep into the water so as nearly to capsize the boat, or skimming the surface in futile sweeping strokes, each one intent only on his own endeavour, so that the boat rocking violently in a smother of foam made no perceptible headway. We had a moment only to observe all this, for almost at once Oslo, who was on deck at the time, was shouting us into action. There remained one boat in reserve. This we manned, and lowering away gave chase to the fugitives. We overhauled them rapidly, for they were still struggling with their oars in an uncoördinated confusion, though one fellow, precariously balanced in the stern, was attempting to force them to order by howling out some rhythmic chant—probably one of their own canoe songs—and kicking and thumping

at the nearest to bring them to obedience. But it was unavailing, for as they saw us so swiftly

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coming up with them they broke into a wail of despair. Several plunged overboard, some fell prostrate between the thwarts, the singer and one other only stood up as though to defend themselves; but seeing muskets levelled upon them they followed their comrades into the sea. We took possession of the boat and the few slaves cowering there, then looked round for those who had jumped overboard. One we recovered, but the rest had vanished. They must have swum resolutely downward till the water choked them. We saw no more of them. If their bodies rose before the sharks seized them it was after we had left the spot. One of the hands had also disappeared. The other, Chapel, we found unconscious at the bottom of the boat, with a cutlass gash across his scalp.

Meanwhile the uproar had spread. It had been promptly checked on the other boats, at the cost of a life or two, but on the ship it was more serious. For myself, leaping to Oslo's command and with a definite duty ahead, I had not noticed any disturbance on deck, but returning I found the slaves—those who had been granted their freedom—cooped up by the fo'c'sle under a covering line of muskets, many of them with limbs raw from the slashing of whips. And bodies were lying here and there, some writhing, some inert; among them one of the crew with his head staved in. It was clear what had happened. The sudden outbreak on the boat had set the slaves in a ferment. On the instant they had seized whatever weapons lay to hand and had run

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amok. They were under control now, shrinking behind one another, clinging together like children, their spirits utterly broken; and as the guard advanced among them, fetters in hand, they yielded without protest.

The whole affair seemed to be over before it had well begun. But it left an unpleasantness behind it. For one thing, though Chapel recovered, there was a gap of two in our ship's company. As it happened the dead men were no particular friends of mine, but there were others who missed them more keenly, and who vowed to avenge them. And for another thing, as though visibly to symbolise our distrust, the bodies of three victims, arbitrarily chosen to expiate the crime of all, dangled for days at the yard-arm.

After this the slaves in the boats were shackled to the thwarts, and those on deck were kept in irons all day as at first. Moreover, stricter precautions were taken to prevent any further rising. Beside the native guard there had always been armed sentinels of our own men on watch by the fo’c’sle and the poop. These were now doubled. Also a permanent guard was set within the cabin. This, as I told you, spanned the deck like a barricade, and though occupied by the women had been strengthened for defence and looped for musketry. At the back it gave into a little lobby which opened into the staterooms of the Captain and his officers, the lobby being approachable also by a companion from the poop. All the arms and ammunition, except a supply for the guard which always lay to hand in a chest in the cabin,

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was stored, together with the liquor, in a chamber under the Captain’s apartment. To this was now added a water-cask and emergency provisions, so that the after part of the ship was like a castle keep, stocked ready for siege.

On the evening of the outbreak the Captain summoned all hands aft, and after haranguing us on the necessity for the strictest watch in future, explained the tactics to be followed in the event of mutiny. That day the mutiny had been immediately suppressed; but if first measures failed, and the slaves got dangerously out of hand, we were to withdraw, on the signal of three whistles, to the protection of the poop and the cabin, the watch on deck at once manning the cabin, and the watch below making the best of their way—by masts and rigging, if need were—to the poop. “And ye’ll need to look alive,” he concluded, severely surveying our ranks from end to end. “I’ve never yet had mutiny on ship of mine, and please God I never shall. But there’s naught but evil in the black hearts of the heathen, naught but treachery and malice and hate. And today they have shed blood, and the smell of it will be in their nostrils. So ye’ll need to sleep with your eyes open; and ye’ll need to jump before ye wake. For if not, ye’ll think there’s mercy in hell to what ye’ll find at the hands of your brother men.”

He seemed about to say more. His face began to work with a ferocious excitement, and I expected him to launch into puritanical anathemas. But he flung out an

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arm in a dumb gesture, and turning abruptly on his heel left us.

During the night I was at the wheel, and though Captain Andrew was on the poop during the whole of my trick he never took notice of me by a single word.

CHAPTER NINETEEN

THE SEA lay like oil. The sky burned like brass. And for days the slaves worked at the oars. We advanced, of course, but in that featureless waste, with no sign by which to judge our movement, we seemed to be transfixed to a single point in the centre of a landless world. Yet we circumvented the cruiser. But whether the Captain had misjudged, or whether the cruiser had guessed our tactics, or whether it was by the mere chance of things, we had not entirely shaken her off. One day, after the boats had been called in, and we were manœuvring the ship to light variable airs, a sail was sighted on the starboard quarter. There was not one of us but was convinced on the instant that this was the cruiser we had been at such pains to avoid. She was behind us now, however, but she must have sighted us, and if she recognised us as the vessel she had previously seen would be in pursuit of us with the first wind. For our disappearance during the night must have betrayed our uneasiness, and she could not but guess our true nature.

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As it happened the weather freshened into gusts, which blew disconcertingly from all points of the compass, so that we were continually leaping for the ropes to trim the sails to meet them. Captain Andrew on the poop stood with lifted face, sniffing the air, scanning the sky, every sense alert for the least shift of the wind. But for all his seamanship the cruiser gained upon us. In a very little she was hull up over the horizon. And throughout the day, though not appearing to move, she gradually grew, unfolded, clarified into shape, like some living thing. With the fall of night, however, half the sea still lay between us, but such another day would bring her right upon us.

As soon as the darkness hid her the Captain altered his course hard a-port. If the wind had held we might have won to safety, for though the cruiser would guess that we would change direction she could not know which way we would choose, and her surest plan would be to hold straight on, hoping to sight us in the morning to one side or the other. As indeed was the case, for the wind slackened to fitful breaths so that we made but little headway. Even so our gain had been considerable, for at dawn the cruiser was once more a mere speck on the horizon, this time on our port

quarter. Yet with the evening she was closer to us than on the evening before.

This continued for several days, so that our nerves became uncertain under the strain. The wind was never strong enough to bring her up with us during the light;

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though once she drew so near that the men were discernible about her deck and rigging, and indeed she sent a couple of balls after us from her bow-chasers to bring us to. They fell far short, however, and we cheered derisively; yet somehow that ineffectual gesture sharpened into vivid actuality the imminence of our peril. For though we had escaped that day, yet with the breeze always falling at night so that we could not baffle her in the darkness, the next day might bring her alongside, and the story would be ended.

All this time the slaves were kept under hatches, and the ship was once again in a fever with their moaning. And there was little sleep in the fo'c'sle. Not that we talked much; but we lay uneasily awake, alert for the least alarm. We were forbidden to burn a light, which set us the more on edge; for in the darkness we could hear one or another start abruptly up on his bunk, disturbed by some unusual sound. "What is it?" we would ask, while we all sat listening, till Old Sawny's recomposing grunt, "'Tan't no more'n them black cattle below," would reassure us and we would lie down again, though not to sleep. Cocky was the chief offender in this way. He was continually a-jump, startling us from a drowse with, "Lumme, wot's that?" We would curse him roundly, the more so that he betrayed to us our own fear. "I tell yer, I heard sumfink," he would declare. "Why don't one uv yer git aht and see?" We would abuse him afresh in a chorus of oaths till he subsided.

On one such occasion, I remember, Fritz leapt from

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his bed and seizing Cocky by the throat shook him till by his gurgling we thought he would be strangled.

"If you speak yet something," Fritz exclaimed, "I shake your life out by your mouth for you. So—— so——. Dat you find also good as a rope. So——"

He released the wretched fellow at length, and Cocky gasping for breath cursed him for a damned Dutchman, which brought Fritz upon him again, so that for a time the fo'c'sle was shrill with their vociferations. Fritz seemed in a paroxysm of hysteria, and began to scream in his own tongue, while Cocky's head thumped audibly on his bunk as Fritz shook him. Pips forced him away at last, and pushed him back on his own bed. Here he immediately regained his good humour. "You remember that, Cocky," he laughed. "A little lesson, yes? A naice little lesson, yes? You remember how I teach you a naice little lesson, and you be good boy." While Cocky set to taunting him, "Ye're scared, that's wot ye are. Scared, 'cos yer fink yer'll have ter fight. 'Cos yer fink yer'll have ter fight wiv the English, yah! But you git behind me, boy, I'll look arter yer." It was an insane duet: "Scared, yah!"—"A naice little lesson." No one troubled to intervene further, and eventually it dwindled out.

Yet when at last a fight looked inevitable the men were calm and resolute enough. That was perhaps some three days later. One night the wind failed entirely, so that with the morning the cruiser was as close to us as

on the previous evening. Fortunately the calm still held, so that she could approach no nearer; fortunately too we were well out of gunshot. But it soon became clear that the issue was to be settled that day, for shortly after dawn three boats were lowered from the cruiser, and began to make towards us. They had a considerable space of sea to cross, and we had ample leisure to make our dispositions and prepare our defence. This was a simple matter. As there were three boats we were divided into three parties under the two mates and the bo'sun, each party, to avoid confusion, being detailed to oppose a particular boat. The Captain carried no cannon; whether trusting to his good luck or to the righteousness of his cause, I don't know; but there were arms and ammunition in plenty. The fire-arms were shared out and loaded in readiness, and the balls and powder set in open chests and disposed at convenient intervals here and there. And to stimulate our defiance the Captain hoisted the Union Jack, scorning to attempt evasion, as was usual with the slavers, by raising the flag of Portugal or Spain.

As the boats drew nearer we saw that one, the biggest of the three, was carrying a small carronade. This was alarming in a way; not that it could

sink us, but it might seriously disable us by damaging our masts and rigging, and so make our eventual capture inevitable. And it could fire on us well beyond the reach of our muskets, so that we could do nothing to hinder it. "We shall have to go out and meet them, and put that cannon

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out of action," I said, turning as I thought to Nick. But I found Plasters beside me.

He was carrying his little cane tucked under his arm, and his pale face wore its customary vacant expression.

"There'll soon be work for you," I greeted him.

"Yes," he said, "I've been expostulating with the Captain. Nature prescribes sun and air. I won't accuse him of deliberate malice; I don't think he understands his own motives. But his mind is poisoned with hate."

I didn't know what he was talking about, and I told him so.

He gaped at me for a little in mild surprise.

"I find it an extraordinarily interesting case," he went on at length. "I've observed him when a slave is being flogged. It titillates some morbid nerve in him. And to keep them below and know that they suffer stimulates him like a drug. I find this difficult to harmonise with any philosophy. Fear is a preservative, to warn us away from danger; but hate seems to serve no vital purpose. It is wasteful, self-consuming——"

"Oh," I cried, suddenly enlightened, "you're talking of the Captain and the slaves."

"I'm speculating on the function of hate," he corrected me.

"Well," I retorted, "suppose you speculate on the function of those boats, and get yourself some sort of weapon."

He looked across the water at my indication, to all appearances seeing the boats for the first time.

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"They are neither here nor there," he said. "They are irrelevant. They represent an ephemeral order of things. They have no basis in reality. They are an insult to the drama to which this ship happens to be the stage. I was talking——"

"And if you keep on talking," I interposed, "you'll soon find the stage set for a very different play."

And yet, in spite of the urgent actuality of those approaching boats, I felt that Plaster was philosophically right. The drama was between the Captain and the slaves, or rather the jungle of which they were the living symbol, and its significance was a fundamental import. The intrusion of British law was a mere officious interruption.

“Possibly,” Plasters continued, “hate may serve to check an overgrowth and so conserve the normal. A world of love would choke itself in its own repletion. There is a mandate to destroy as well as to create. Captain Andrew——”

“Captain Andrew,” I again broke in, “is concerned just now with saving our necks. That’s a cruiser over there,” I explained ironically, “and those people are coming to capture us.”

At that he began to laugh, his body folding over itself in loose collapse. Then he set to fumbling through his pockets, and eventually drew out a little bottle of pills. He uncorked it in his uncertain way and shook a pill into his palm, offering it to me.

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“If you swallow this,” he said, “you won’t need to trouble about your neck.”

I stared at him in horror.

“Suicide!” I could not adequately express my disgust. “Never!”

“It is sometimes convenient,” he replied without emotion, and was putting the pill back into the bottle; but Nick, who must have overheard the talk, suddenly snatched it from him. “Let’s have it,” he said. “This is a damned silly business, but the swabs don’t string me up alive.”

The boats were within hail now, and a voice came over the water, “Ship ahoy!”

The Captain answered the summons.

“What ship are you?” came the question.

“The *Jehovah*, whaler.”

“Have you slaves aboard?”

“You may come and see.”

For a moment it looked just possible that the answer might bluff them into turning back, for they hung on their oars a little and the officers seemed to be conferring together. Later I understood what it was that made them hesitate; but the next instant they were advancing again, all three

boats, I was glad to notice, for I was afraid that the large boat with the carronade would lie back out of our range.

Then of a sudden there was a shrill whistling overhead. Just at first I thought the gun must have been

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fired, and a shot was tearing through our rigging. But the sound came from forward. Swinging round I saw that while I had been talking with Plasters, and had had my attention fixed on the boats astern, the sky ahead had been blackening with storm. Even now I had but an instant to take in its significance, for all hands were peremptorily ordered to hoist the sails. We dropped our weapons and made for the ropes. A second blast swept down upon us with double the fury of the first. The ship trembled with the shock, gathered headway, and slanted into the wind. There were shouts behind us from the boats, and a single ball was discharged against us. That was the beginning and the end of the battle. It did no damage beyond cutting a rope or two and splintering a spar. Before the gun could be reloaded we were already leaving the boats behind. And indeed, the men, realising their own peril, were putting about on a sea already rocking, and making back for the cruiser. All was bustle there too, for with the wind arisen she could give chase. But there was little to fear from her now. In a following wind she could overhaul us, but with the gale ahead we had the speed of her, And it was full into the gale that the Captain was taking us, driving into a sky of pitch, a-grumble with thunder and cloven with jagged lightning, as though indignantly throwing off the impertinent pursuit by hiding in the heart of a hurricane.

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CHAPTER TWENTY

IT WAS a hurricane indeed. Behind us the heaven was still blue, and half the sea shimmered in sunlight. But ahead an intensity of darkness came raging up to meet us, thrusting black arms of cloud across the sky, driving white wedges of foam into the water. As though at a breath the light went out of our vessel; at another breath the gleaming cruiser became a shadow. Behind it a last space of retreating sunshine was slipping from the ocean. It became a thin line along the horizon under a dwindling reach of blue. Then the sky and sea closed together, and the night swallowed us.

By now the wind was bearing upon us with howling buffets, setting the air between blasts in an ominous whine. We seemed to be enveloped in an opaque shadow into which the masts vanished. A dazzling flash of lightning showed us the cruiser for the last time, hove to under backed topsails. After this the thickening air completely obscured her, though for a little we heard her guns firing to recall the boats. Then even that ceased, and we were alone.

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I had known storms before, but never one that had grown up with such ferocious speed, or charged upon us with such deliberate malice. I felt my spirit cowed, drained of all resistance, as though I were in the grip of something not natural, something endued with demoniac strength and demoniac purpose. There seemed force enough in it to sweep us, not merely back upon the waiting cruiser, but back upon that ugly shore from which we had crawled with such sluggish labour. Left to myself I should have put the ship about and run before it, yielding as to an inevitable fate. I was conscious of a dull stupidity of anger against the Captain that he should pit himself against it. Yet I admired him too; not only for his individual determination, but because he symbolised for me the indomitable courage of man resolute in the teeth of assured disaster. For to begin with he crowded on all sail as though in an urgency to meet the tempest face to face. In a very little indeed the courses were clewed up and the topsails reefed; yet even so there was enough canvas on the ship for a change of wind to lay her on her side. And rapidly now the whining air grew into a continuous scream, and heeling over with alarming dips to the

sharper bursts of wind we drove forward at an incredible speed. The thunder became an incessant uproar, dazedly deafening, and the lightning seemed to be striking at us with pointed spears. It was impossible that we should live; yet we did live.

Monstrous seas towered before us, heaving themselves

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up into sudden confronting walls. The ship struck, leapt, and rising almost vertical dipped heavily over, while we clung to stays and stanchions, gripping under a crushing inundation that strained at our limbs. The next moment we were plunging downward into an abysmal trough, and striking felt the ship tremble as though she would fall in pieces. And this continued as though it had had no beginning and would have no end. There was nothing to do now but endure.

Twice there was a cry of man overboard. But there could be no thought of rescue. Its effect was to make us grip the more desperately. The lightning showed us to one another, drenched wretches crouching wherever there was support and shelter, with drawn faces and eyes wide. A crashing sea carried away the galley as though it had been a loose box. The deck water, surging up and down as we tossed, shivered the door of the fo'c'sle, and sweeping in laid it in havoc. With every upward tilt of the ship chests and bedding floated out and were lost upon the waste. And from end to end the whole vessel was in a shriek from the slaves below and the women in the cabin.

It seemed to me that no compulsion, beyond that of the wrenching sea, would tear me from where I clung. Yet at Oslo's hail for men to save the fore hatch I responded without thought. The battering water was tearing it loose. If it broke away, not merely would the slaves be drowned but the ship would founder. I can't pretend to say how we saved it. We needed all our

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strength to maintain ourselves on the deck; yet tools came from somewhere, and by impossible feats of grip and balance we succeeded in nailing down three stout timbers across the threatened hatch. Yet the next moment these were giving, and the work had to be done again. While we were at it, too, the after hatch might be more firmly secured. The action heartened us. It was something to do. I discovered in myself an unsuspected fund of determination. For long spells it was impossible to stir a limb. With

two or three others I found myself holding a timber in place while boarding seas drove at us, sucked at us, in a fury to dislodge us, yet we held till in a calmer moment another who had the hammer could drive in the nails. I was sorry when the work was over. For now came another long spell of inactive endurance which sapped the spirit and left it cringing.

The wind seemed to me to have no particular direction. Indeed, it was not a wind; it was an upheaval of the atmosphere. It was a loosened fury of unimaginable power. Yet through it the Captain was conning the ship. The lightning showed him on the poop, lashed, I believe, with Old Sawny to the wheel. The two isolated figures appeared and vanished with the flashes, detached greyly against the blackness, high in air or deep in a gulf, then were swallowed into it amid a roar of thunder. It was an amazement to me that anything human should retain understanding command amid such formless tumult. Yet the Captain's attitude, erect, and with alert and lifted face, declared him in resolute

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control. I began to notice too that from time to time he altered the course. It was as though he were feeling for a gap in the wall of storm that confronted him. It was not his intention merely to let it blow over him, but to penetrate it, to make it a barrier against further molestation. I was intoxicated by his superb daring. I wanted him to triumph. He seemed to me so admirable, so tremendous, dominating a chaos by the singleness of his will. He had allied himself with a hurricane. He had harpooned a continent. Yet I felt an insurgent pity. Because, for a reason I could not formulate I remembered the drumming in the jungle. He might master the elements; but the slaves would drag him back.

For a long time this obsession possessed me. I seemed to be living again that strange episode at Molumbo, paddling with Nick down the river, creeping with the Captain through the jungle. All that had happened years ago. I remembered Rita and Nick's savage bride. Then I was lurched abruptly into awareness. I lost grip, struck my head upon something, seized and clung. I was holding to a stump of the wrecked galley, with my body sprawling across the deck. The ship was on her side, and the sea was thumping her. With a rending crack she staggered up to a slant. The lightning stabbed, and showed us the fore mast in a ruin with the main topmast broken and dragging amid torn cordage. There was no need for Oslo

to shout us to the rescue. We set upon the wreckage, hacking it free. Severed ropes twined about us like snakes, kicked at us like

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horses. An immense sea came to our assistance, wrenching the whole tangle bodily into the ocean. Then for a moment the wind caught us and spun us helplessly about as though in a whirl-pool. We were ordered to the main mast to shake out a reef of the course to give us steerage way. The wind flooding into the loosened canvas nearly swept it from our grip. But we held in desperation, and the reef was set. In a little the ship steadied, but with the fore mast gone she swung crazily to the heave of the storm.

It might have been day; it might have been night. Days and nights might already have passed over us. For no bells were struck, and there was no reckoning the slow lapse of the hours. Then quite without warning I became aware of a change. The uproar of the elements, though still dazing to the senses, had altered its note. Also I was conscious of a peculiar relief. I was free of a strain, a pressure. The water washing over me no longer gripped and drew. Then happening to notice the sails, I understood. The air had fallen to a dead calm. It was fantastic, because the sea was still in a monstrous agitation, and the lightning ringed the sky completely about. Yet there was no longer any wind.

I had little time to meditate on this. Advantage was to be taken of the respite to put the ship in better trim. What duties the others were set to I did not know at the time, though later I found they had rigged a jury fore mast, and boarded up the doorway of the fo'c'sle.

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I was chosen with a few of my mates to attend to the slaves.

With the quieting of the wind their outcries became alarmingly assertive; and when we wrenched clear a hatch the sudden issuing clamour was that of tortured beasts. But it was too dark below to see what was happening. Some of the boys were brought from the cabin to carry torches, and the guard was sent down to establish some sort of order before we followed to set things straight. But their whips were of no avail. The shrieking continued undiminished. At length Oslo leapt down bidding us follow. The torchlight showed the slaves heaped to one side of the vessel—thrown there, it must have been, when she heeled over—and struggling now among themselves in an inextricable confusion of writhing limbs, with eyes

gleaming and teeth bare. We fell upon them, dragging away the topmost and tossing them to the clear side of the ship. But it was desperate work, for we could not stand upright, and the slaves were insane with panic and fought like cats. We took to clubbing them into silence, and so drawing them free. Yet others beneath clung to them in a frenzy; and it was only by kicking at fixed jaws and slashing with our cutlasses at clenched fingers and imprisoning arms that we could effect their release. It was pitiable; for our hands frequently closed on raw wounds and broken limbs, yet gentleness was impossible. Eventually, however, we had them more or less in place. Then to prevent

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any recurrence of the calamity we stapled their fetters to the floor. Yet their condition was appalling. They lay sprawled across one another, for all we could do. There could not have been one without hurts. Many had such fractures that the bones protruded through the skin. A number had been suffocated to death. But most of these were shackled to living companions. We had no time to separate them, not knowing when the storm might break upon us afresh, and the corpses had to be left below, though where we came upon a pair who were both dead we pushed them up through the hatch to be thrown later into the sea. And so we left them, moaning in their pain and wretchedness, one or two babbling in incoherent delirium, others starting into sharp screams at the wrench of a tortured limb. And the planks they were lying on, kicked awry in the turmoil, were slippery with blood and vomit and excrement, and the atmosphere so foul that when we staggered up to the clean air it went to our heads like a powerful spirit and set us reeling. Yet the guards were sent below again with biscuits and water; and that was the limit of our ministrations. When all was over the hatch was battened down once more, for the tempest was by no means passed.

Indeed, a very few minutes later the wind was again upon us, taking us hard aback. It was as though the hurricane had circled to cut off our advance, opposing us with redoubled fury from full ahead.

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CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

THE SHIP lived as by a miracle, hove to under its jury rig; for the dismasting had convinced Captain Andrew that there was no battling through such a storm. The ocean piled itself against us in terrifying masses of water, slipped from under us in sickening chasms. A single buffet on the beam from those pounding seas would have shivered us into splinters, but holding head on we clambered and wallowed, dragged upward as by a chain, dropped as through an opening trap. We did not merely rise and fall. We laboured up towering slopes as by an immensity of effort, heaved slowly to the level, then plunged over a precipice in a racing dive; one moment at the summit, stifled, wrenched, trampled on, as some curling monster toppled over us in foam, the next thrown violently like a wrestler in a fall as we brought up hard in the trough below. We lifted into a shriek of wind, subsided into a silence, shut out from the upper tumult within enclosing walls of water. When the lightning failed for a moment we were swallowed into an impenetrable density of darkness,

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but in its almost incessant play the ship showed in startling relief against the black sky and the livid sea, her masts and spars outlined in running spurts of fire.

We crouched for shelter beneath the fo’c’sle. The driven surf swept over us in a sheet, charged back upon us, as the ship nosed over, in a surging deluge. We clung with numbed arms, with paralysed fingers, in a blind stupefaction of the senses, yet with a conscious straining for the stable in a world given over to insensate upheaval. Conscious too of our companionship; for as we emerged from a weltering smother of foam, or steadied to the rise, with the ship still quivering from the thud of a downward plunge, we would look across at one another, eyes meeting eyes in dumb regard.

But as the hours dragged on with no relaxation of the tempest the strain of silence became impossible to endure. From time to time Fritz would break into a childish laughter; Slobbers would shriek out a shrill protracted curse. Cocky, cowering somewhere under a protecting huddle of bodies, would whimper, “Oh fawver!” or rounding upon Slobbers would cry at him

to stow his infernal shindy. "Ain't it bad enough," he would complain, "wivaht yer screaming like a bloody gal? Put a sock in it, fer Christ's sake; yer give a feller the shivers, yer do an' all." Slobbers was too obsessed with his own terror to answer even by a threat. His profanities became increasingly insistent, till at length with nerve completely broken he fell into an incomprehensible gabble which sounded like some insane accompaniment

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to the crashing thunder and the howling wind and the hissing water. Fritz's laughter, too, lost its false jollity and took on something of the uncertainty of hysteria. "*Ach was!*" he would splutter, "dat was a naughty one, yes? I haf swallowed half of dat one. Whoop! Down we go! Bump! I haf think Davy Jones get us dat time. Heigh, Cocky boy, up we go again! But I leave my stomach down below, I think. But dat's never mind." And he would set off into an uncontrollable giggle, while Cocky would turn upon him with, "Wot' cher wan' cher keep laughing fer? Blimey, I can't see nuffink ter laugh at. If it ain't Slobbers then it's you. One on yer blubbers and tother laughs. Yer're scared, that's wot it is; ye're scared, yer bloody stoopid pair o' swabs!" Yet when Bungs, at an unexpected lurch of the vessel, lost grip and went rolling down the deck, it was Fritz who was immediately after him. They were thrown violently into the starboard scuppers, caught in a boarding crest and washed across to port, then as the ship plunged were tumbled back to us under the fo'c'sle, rolling over each other as though in an angry encounter. We seized them, and held them from slipping till they could regain their grip. Bungs throughout did not utter a sound, but his eyes stood roundly out from his face. Fritz was more in a giggle than ever. "He roll like a ball, dat man," he told us. "When the ship go down dat never mind, because I just sit on him and he float good. Sure, he float good."

Papa was on one side of me and Chapel on the other.

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Papa made one remark that I remember: "It don't do for sailormen to marry, Joey." This he repeated three or four times in a pathetic straining after his manner of wise innuendo. But little by little the cold gripped him. His knees knocked together, his shoulders twitched, his teeth rattled, till at length speech for him was impossible. Thereafter he was oblivious to me, crouching against the fo'c'sle with curled up limbs, his whole body in a

violent shudder and shaken from time to time with rending spasms, a pitiable dumb misery.

Chapel, too, seemed absorbed with his own distress. He was still weak, I knew, from his wound, and I kept an eye on him for signs of failing. He endured with the patient fortitude that I expected of him, his face expressing a mild sense of suffering. Though he acknowledged me by an occasional wan smile yet for a long time he had nothing to say. I was beginning to forget him, to forget everything in the bewilderment of the endless uproar, when I realised that he was talking to me. I seemed to come out of a heavy dream to hear him say, "Keep clear of the women."

I was so amazed that I shot out a hand and seized him. "Are you all right?" I asked.

"I wanted to warn you, Joey," he repeated. "Keep clear of the women."

It still seemed to me that he was wandering in mind, yet there was no wildness, no vacancy, in his gentle face. His lips trembled a little, and hung rather loosely

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apart, but that was a weakness natural to them. I asked him again if he was all right.

"The others," he followed his own thought, "it's only what you might expect of them. You can't make silk purses out of sows' ears. But you're a gentleman, Joey. Black and white don't mix. Besides, the Captain has his eyes open. He'll catch them at it, and he'll teach them a lesson they won't forget. I just wanted to warn you, Joey. I've had it on my mind to warn you for some time. It would be a pity, for the sake of a word——"

All this at such a time was so astonishing that I could find no answer to make. I knew quite well that the Captain had forbidden all intercourse with the black women; I knew too that some of the hands were aggrieved at the restriction. But I had given the matter no second thought, and I was not likely to be meditating adultery now with the sea beneath me and the sky above in frenzied convulsion.

"You needn't worry about me," I told him.

"You choose bad friends," he went on, "and you're only a boy. There's a long voyage before you. You don't know the temptation."

"Do you?" I put it to him pointedly. It seemed to me that of a sudden I understood the secret of those amiable uncertain features; and I was annoyed too by his absurd talk.

The next moment I could have bitten out my tongue. We were rising to a tremendous billow. Chapel turned

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to me as though to answer; then his face went ashen, his body fell limp. He was slipping. But before I could stay him I was flattened to the deck beneath a smashing weight of water, and when I had dragged myself clear, my lungs choking and my head dizzy, he had gone. I clung stupidly to my place, staring at the emptiness where just now he had been, shaking in every limb with an unnameable terror.

After this I noticed nothing of my mates about me, but kept my eyes steadfastly on the Captain, in whose resolute intelligence was our only hope of salvation.

There were other alarms, other labours; but I do not care to enumerate them. I did not fail at any call for action; but I worked in a daze, in a stupefied puerility of resentment. When the main mast went, finding an axe in my hand I hacked as though at an enemy in mortal combat. When I found myself swept off my feet and washed from scupper to scupper, I had no thought for my life, but fought with the unreasoning fury of an animal tangled in a net. I was aware of myself at one moment with my teeth fixed on a fife-rail. Yet later, with no knowledge of how I came there, I was back under the fo'c'sle. And again, with no comprehension of what I was about, I was heaving at a rope. Of the issue at stake I am unaware to this day, yet I strained with a blindness of tenacity which would not have yielded though I had been dragged bodily into the ocean. And between such bouts of meaningless endeavour I was crouched at my old place, my frenzied obstinacy

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all ebbed from me, my will prostrate, my mind heaving in hallucination from horror to horror. At one time it would be Chapel, slipping from my grasp, with some warning of tremendous import unspoken on his lips. At another it was the slaves below, convulsed in unspeakable torment. But whatever it was that obsessed me, the lunatic jabberings of Slobbers, the dancing devilries of the jungle, it came pictured before me in enormous images of writhing shadow, obscure with some phantasmal significance. Yet always my eyes were upon the Captain. I dared not lose him from my sight. It was he who had involved us in such calamities; it was for him that

the elements were howling. I knew it with an unformulated conviction, as I knew that that evil black human freightage below tethered him to the darkness from which I had dragged him. Yet apart from him I had no strength. With every cessation of the lightning, with every inundation of the seas, I watched for the reappearance of his figure, vigilant and erect upon the poop. If I had missed him I should have released my hold and surrendered to the storm, but while I could still fix my gaze on him it was as though my determination were vicariously braced by the audacity of his magnificent defiance.

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

IT WAS computed later that the tempest lasted for two days. During all that time, except for the single peculiar respite of which I have told you, when we seemed to have penetrated to a centre of calm at the very heart of the disturbance, there was no appreciable slackening of the tremendous weather. And at the end, when the wind began to subside, it fell away so rapidly in a few dying gusts that, before our stunned intelligences could well understand what was happening, the hurricane had swept over us, hallooing into the distance and dragging after it the last tattered fringes of its skirts across a sky already blue.

Exhausted as we were from fatigue and hunger and exposure there was no repose for us yet. What with new masts to step, new sails to bend, a new galley to build, innumerable repairs to make to rigging and yards and timbers, there was a week's work before us to set the ship in order. And there were the slaves.

Indeed they were our first care. Almost before we realised that the storm was passed we were bringing them on deck. This duty devolved on us as the guard

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were as prostrate as the wretches in their charge. I can't pretend to give you any adequate impression of the odour of stagnant putrescence which rose in a visible steam as we wrenched the hatches open, nor the harrowing wail of utter anguish that filled the darkness below. It was a miracle that anything lived there, for we could only endure to remain for a few minutes at a time, creeping in, unlocking the shackles, pushing the slaves towards the hatches, and scrambling back again for air. Even so we emerged after each bout with our skin in a fever and the blood thumping at our ears.

As for the slaves, they came out staggering like drunken men, those who could walk at all; for many of them could do no more than drag themselves to the hatchways, too weak to heave themselves on deck, and others were too collapsed even to shift from where they lay. A great number were dead, or so near death that they were not worth the saving. These we left to the last, so that, when the living were cleared, the bodies still lying below, in

every attitude of agonised contortion, strewed the floor like corpses on a field of battle. Then these were carried up and thrown into the sea.

Before we set to cleaning that reeking dungeon we erected windsails at the hatches so as first to sweeten the air; then we fell to with holy-stone, scraping away the caked ordure from that inconceivably fouled planking and washing it all clean with vinegar, and for a final purification setting red hot irons in buckets of tar to clear the loaded infection from the atmosphere.

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The slaves, meanwhile, were shoved and kicked into place around the upper deck. No care was taken to secure them, because in their miserable debility they had no spirit to rebel. Plasters and the Captain made a hurried round of them to decide which were too sick and broken for healing, the condemned cases being unceremoniously tossed over the side. As a result some two thirds of the original cargo remained, nearly every one requiring attention.

The first meal brought a fresh problem. Though the slaves would have drunk the ship dry, yet they refused to eat. We were obliged to feed them forcibly, holding them and stuffing the food into their mouths, lashing them into obedience if they disgorged it. In the evening too, trying to stir their sluggish spirits into life, we applied the same persuasion to make them dance and sing. Yet in a few days, the weather still holding fine, they began to revive. Their sunken cheeks filled, they squatted with lifted heads, they chatted and laughed together, and became alert for the evening's jollity at the first sound of the drums. Indeed, with their renewed vigour they showed signs here and there of insubordination, and it was necessary to return to our earlier precautions.

We too were restored to our first energy. With the serene blue sky, the placid sea, the gently moving air, we were able to laugh at our memories of the storm. We fed with an appetite, slept like gorged animals, and laboured cheerily through the day at the work of repairs,

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promising ourselves that by the time all was seaworthy again we would be in the trades bowling easily along for the Indies. As far as there could be contentment on such an adventure we were thoroughly content.

An incident now occurred which reminded me sharply of Chapel's warning. One day Nick pointed out to me a young naked girl with the remark, "Shapely little beauty, eh?"

I turned on him with some alarm.

"You know the Captain's orders," I said.

"Hush, hush!" he replied, winking at me. "There are dark corners, and some people know how to keep their eyes shut."

The girl suddenly squatted before one of the chained slaves and fell to chattering and giggling. Nick's face went solemn.

"It seems to me," I said, "that she has a preference for her own colour."

"Little bitch!" Nick exclaimed petulantly, and swung round on his heel.

After this I kept my eyes and ears open. Talk in the fo'c'sle had naturally enough turned frequently on women, and many a gross jest was tossed to and fro about the girls on the ship. But this had always seemed to me mere pointless male indecency. Now, however, I became convinced that two or three of the hands had illicit dealings with the women. Fritz most certainly was one; Cocky would dearly have liked us to believe

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he was another. There were whispers too concerning M'sieu Louis. All this, however, had nothing to do with me, and I kept my tongue quiet; but I was frightened for Nick.

I was disturbed in another way too. Old Sawny, whenever the subject was broached, lent his authority on the side of the Captain. "It don't do, that it don't," he would grumble, "and the Ole Man's wise, and knows it. It an't the yaws on'y; that don't kill a man. And it an't ezakly discipline. It's wot the little devils can git out o' yer. They got their own lovers among them black fry, an' if they opens their gates to yer it's 'cos they've a end o' their own to serve, an' that's the holy truth. I knowed a swab, a cook he were and a rare fine seaman, but he were that besotted wi' a bit o' black flesh that he took to stealing rum and serving it out between decks 'cos if not she wouldn't let him put a finger to her. An' another time there was a mutiny set up while all the hands was in the cabin mucking among the women. An' this here lot we shipped aboard, trust me, they're a nasty crew. They're cannibals mostly, and they'd cut up ugly if they caught yer winking. An' them women, artful, they are an' all, hand in glove, they are an' all. You steer clear, 'cos it an't worth it, just 'cos yer've got a silly bit of an itch on

yer; it an't worth it. An' if the Ole Man catches yer at it yer'll learn sharp enough who's skipper on this here ship; you will an' all, swelp me Gawd!"

Fritz would laugh merrily at all this. "I'm a bad

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man," he would say. "I give you dat for a secret. But the good God make dis thing so naice, and I say tank-you, isn't it?"

Yet it perturbed me so that I kept a jealous watch on Nick, and I nagged him so persistently that for a time he would break away whenever he saw me approaching. But his good humour prevailed, and he rounded bantering on me in his turn. "You know I've a weakness for dusky princesses," he would say. "I promise you I won't stoop lower than a princess."

Then one morning, when the ship was in full trim again, and the weather at its most beneficent, Plasters was found on his bunk with his throat cut.

It was I who found him. It had somehow grown into my duty to accompany him on his rounds. As he was late in appearing on this particular day I went to his room, which was beside the Captain's, to call him. He was sprawled across his bed in an attitude of collapse, his face livid, his eyes staring, his breast in a welter of blood, and across one side of his neck a long red gash that gaped like a mouth. It was clear that he had taken his own life, though for some unfathomable reason using, not the pills he had recommended to me, but his razor, which lay fallen to the floor. And he had cut deeply, with no uncertain hand. I remembered, seeing him dead before me, that he had been somewhat abstracted of late, setting and bandaging as though his mind were in another world. Yet that had not struck me as peculiar, because it was natural with him. But now I seemed

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to recall a certain haunting horror in his regard as though his speculations had led him to some frightful conclusion. For a long time I stood and looked at him, limp, motionless, impassive, feeling somewhere a significance in that abrupt rejection of life, discarded not in fear of the gallows, nor in panic of the hurricane, but in deliberate response to some logical inference from the nature of existence. It was indeed as though that gash across the neck declared his ultimate conviction that the grain of life was evil, and the unsuspected humanity in him had revolted from the appalling implications.

He was buried the same day, with scanty rites as befitted a suicide.

Later in the evening Captain Andrew called me into his cabin, and asked me if I could explain the mystery. It was on my tongue to blurt out my own reading of the matter, but it seemed too fantastical in the face of the Captain's steady regard.

"He was a great thinker," was all I could say.

"Ay," he repeated, "a great thinker. And ye have associated with him, boy. What did he teach ye of his thinking?"

"I could never understand him," I said.

He breathed an "Ah!" of satisfaction, and nodded his head.

"I had it on my heart that he might do ye harm," he went on, "for though his talk in the main was folly,

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yet there was a deal of wickedness in it. He flouted at sacred things."

"He had a very searching reason," I couldn't help saying. "His reason was his conscience, and he obeyed his conscience."

The Captain's face flushed angrily. "His reason was his vanity," he raised his voice, "and he obeyed his vanity.—But there," he became calmer, "he has gone to his Maker. It's ill judging dead men."

He fell to brooding, and I thought he had finished with me and was for slipping away; but suddenly he said, "Boy, ye have learnt something of his craft. Ye are doctor now on this ship."

I was too amazed to speak.

"Ye can collect your dunnage," he continued, "for henceforth ye'll berth aft."

At that I cried out in protest.

"I'd rather not, sir," I told him.

"And for why?" he asked.

"I fear that cabin," I replied prevaricatingly, for the truth was that I didn't wish to leave my mates.

"So," he said, "then have it your own way."

I began to raise difficulties now about my new duties, because I knew nothing of the business of doctoring beyond what I had seen practised by Plasters. But here the Captain was obstinate. It was his will, and I must obey.

"Ye have a heart of pity," he declared; adding bitterly,

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“and where I punish ye can heal. That should satisfy ye.”

There was nothing more to be said. I had already saluted, and was turning to go when the drums struck up, and immediately the air filled with clamour and the deck became a patter of capering feet. At the same moment the Captain sprang up with so sharp an oath that I swung round in the doorway to see what had disturbed him. He was leaning across the little table before him, gripping it with quivering hands which showed white at the knuckles, his face wild with some inexpressible emotion.

“What is it, sir?” I asked.

He felt behind him for his chair, fumblingly like a very old man, and slowly seated himself. He looked likely to prove my first case. There was a bottle of brandy on a shelf, and some glasses. I poured him out a measure and offered it to him. He had no consciousness of what I was doing, but sat with hands limp upon the table, staring rather stupidly up into my face.

“Drink this, sir,” I said.

But he had no eyes for the liquor.

“Ye heard it,” he muttered, “ye heard it. And ye have known the power. Boy,” his tone strengthened, “ye have known the power. But the evil has not entered into your soul. But for me,” he began to shout confusedly, with a passion that alarmed me, “the hour of the dance—the hour of wrestling—wrestling with the Evil One. It is a temptation from the Lord, and I

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must endure it.—But need ye stand there staring at me like a fool?” he suddenly thundered, starting up again and banging the table. “Leave me!”

I fled precipitately with the glass still in my hand.

I understood his agony. Yet seeing the slaves on the deck, released a company at a time, gyrating in jigging circles, chanting nasally to a throb of improvised tom-toms, while their chained companions along the scruppers swayed their bodies and clapped their hands, I felt nothing of the ugly fascination of those midnight rites in the jungle with that horned monstrosity leaping in the red glare of the fire. But for the Captain—I knew now that every evening must be a torment to him. He could have put an end to it with a word, but it was part of his expiation, and he must submit.

I strolled across to the fo’c’sle. I felt shaken out of adjustment by my sudden elevation to the rank of ship’s surgeon. It was altogether ludicrous; also somewhat frightening. I wanted to lie down and think.

I had just reached the fo’c’sle door when there broke out behind me a harrowing screech. It was taken up on the instant by a whooping and yelling from every corner of the vessel. In the moment that it took me to turn about everything had changed. Half the slaves had broken free. Others I saw still wrestling with their chains which by some mystery had been unfastened. The whole deck was seething with naked bodies, capering, screaming, brandishing fagots, leg-irons, belaying-pins. They scattered in aimless units, gathered into

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knots, became masses endued with purpose charging in determined directions. Shots rang out here and there in distracted isolation. A gigantic figure impended above me, with tousled hair and filed teeth, blocking out the view. The next moment he was sprawling at my feet spluttering blood. A second loomed up in his place, more toweringly ferocious. Without considering I butted full into his stomach and laid him flat, then leapt for the fore rat-lines not pausing to look behind me till I had gained the top-mast head.

Three whistles sounded shrilly from the poop.

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CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

I REMEMBERED the summons. The deck was closed to me, so I swarmed across to the main mast intending to drop down by a back stay to the poop. But I was too late. The main sails had hidden from me the after part of the ship, which while I was still in mid air broke into a rattle of musketry, but now I had it full in view. The slaves had already carried the poop deck, though the space before the cabin was dotted with their fallen bodies. The guard, the helmsman, completely overwhelmed, were indicated only by mounds of contorted black limbs, where the savages had fallen on them and were now tearing them piecemeal with nails and teeth. But suddenly one mound fell convulsively apart, and Oslo heaved himself from the midst, throwing off his assailants with bull-like wrenchings of his shoulders, sprang to his feet, slashed clear a space about him, then dominating the deck for a moment with his figure of a viking plunged for the companion, clapping down the hatch above him as he disappeared below. The slaves, cowed for the instant by his fury, clamoured after him,

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beating and straining at the hatch, but unable either to force it open or stave it in.

Another battle was raging about the galley. Already the door was giving as one after another the attackers hurled themselves bodily upon it. It yielded at last with a crash, so that three or four of the slaves were precipitated headlong within. There was a piercing scream, and Slobbers came leaping out, pivoting upon himself like the jungle priest, brandishing his axe in circles, his hair on end, his face scarlet, his lips in a foam. The mob gave back before him, jabbering in panic, many falling prostrate under the fascination of his madness. His axe fell on heads, on shoulders, lopped off an arm complete, drove into a naked back and stuck fast. He set his foot on the fallen body and worked his weapon free, then with demented blows hacked the carcass into fragments. Not an effort was made to hinder him.

Then I saw Bungs. He must have been in the galley too. He was making for the cabin at a gentle trot, his face set on his goal with the simple earnestness of a child. But at the sight of him the slaves came to life again. At a couple of bounds he was overhauled, his round figure tumbled to the

deck helpless as a turtle. A volley from the cabin laid two of his captors low, but others were upon him too numerous to contend with. He was dragged away by the heels, squealing like a pig, his amiable face in an astonishment of terror, and disposed of under cover of the galley.

The next I knew was that Slobbers was beside me on

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the main mast, chattering down at the slaves below like an infuriated ape. A lurch of the vessel nearly sent us both toppling. There was no one at the wheel, and with full sail set the ship was drifting beam on to the weather, tilting over sharply at the least gust.

Meanwhile very different work had been on foot. There seemed to be some sort of order amid the tumult, suggesting forethought and leadership. Realizing that the deck was commanded by the muskets from the cabin, some of the slaves had brought up casks and planking from below and were building a barricade across the ship to either side of the galley. With the poop lost to us they would be secure from our fire, and would moreover have unlimited supplies of food and water. Yet the food they would not need for a time, I realised sickly, for several corpses of the native guard lay tossed beside one of the try-pots, where a fire was already kindled, and the murdered hands from the poop had been carried forward, in preparation for some cannibalistic feast.

I had leisure now to feel alarm on my own account. Slobbers and I were not the only ones who had taken to the masts. There were others on the fore mast, among them Nick. So far no attempt had been made to follow us, but I felt this was only a respite, not an assurance of immunity. We were cut off from the cabin, and we could be hunted later. But I was not content to wait tamely till the hunt should begin. The slaves would probably be clumsy enough among the rigging, but such

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a chase could have only one eventual end. I had visions of calling to my mates in the cabin to open the door, and slipping down the mast make a dash for it. But the odds were too heavy on failure. Besides, if it succeeded once the slaves would be alert to frustrate a second attempt, and the plight of those left behind would be the more precarious. The only hope seemed to be the ports. If these were opened and ropes thrown ready for us we might risk a plunge in the sea, and climbing by the ropes win that way into

the cabin. But though there were faces at the loop-holes, it would have been impossible in the still prevailing babel to make our voices heard, and unless our mates were prepared for us we might be drifted out to sea. There was nothing to do but wait until the uproar subsided. Moreover, night would soon be upon us; and under the cover of darkness we should stand a better chance of success. In the meantime we would need to join our scattered forces. Yet this too would be more wisely left to the night, for the sight of the fore mast party swinging aft might rouse the slaves into pursuit.

The ship lay over with a heavy list, now and again labouring up into the wind and falling sharply off in a wide sweep. If the weather freshened to any considerable extent the masts might go, or the ship be laid on her side. This might be to the advantage of the garrison in the cabin, as the slaves would be thrown into consternation and be at their mercy; but for those of us in the masts the possibility was an added motive to

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make a bid for safety at the first opportunity. Not that there were signs of a gale; but there had been no warning of the hurricane. For that matter there had been no warning of the mutiny. We seemed to be beset by some hostile force that alternately strangled us in a slow grip and struck at us with a savage unexpectancy like a creature possessed of purpose. Even the breeze now, such as it was, was veering to the west.

The night fell rapidly; but as ill luck would have it with the set of the sun the moon rose full, shining athwart the ship and flooding it with light. There was no point in delaying any longer, for whenever we acted we would be in full exposure to the slaves. They were occupied now with their feasting, squatting in confusion about the fore deck, gnawing at hideous lumps of flesh, and to a great measure the uproar had subsided. I tried to draw Nick's attention, but he had no eyes for me. I whistled to him, but the sound was too faint to carry, so I hailed him at last in a shrill halloo. He looked up at that, and I called to him to come across. But my cry had aroused the slaves. Two or three started up and gesticulated towards the masts. In an instant the deck was in an excitement of pointing hands and lifted faces. It seemed that until that moment they had been unaware of us perched above them, but now at the sight of us the clamour broke out afresh. A number of them sprang for the fore rat-lines; but their courage failing them they came to a halt, and dropped back to the deck. Others followed, but none ventured

higher than the futtock shrouds, unmanned by the lurching of the ship. Meanwhile Nick and two others who were with him—one I now recognised as Dusty—scrambled across to us on the main mast. Here it would be difficult to follow, for the main rat-lines were open to the fire from the cabin. Only a rush could carry them; yet even so, with the slaves too timid to climb, our position became unexpectedly secure.

“Gad, Joey!” Nick exclaimed, squeezing my arm as he pushed himself into place beside me on the yard, “I thought you had gone long ago. I shot one brute——”

“It was you?” I interrupted.

“There was a pistol on the deck. Christ knows how it got there. But there wasn’t another. Then I lost you. How did you get away?”

“I used my head, and then my heels,” I told him.

“Well, here we are,” he raced on; “a merry little party, fancy-dress, charades, and all that. That damnation cruiser got on my nerves, but this will be something to write home about. I admit I felt a bit humpy when I thought they’d got you. You haven’t told me yet how you dodged them. Great black sod! He’d have made a mouthful of you and then looked round for more. They’ve finished off old Bungs, you know.”

“It makes me sick,” I said.

“I hope he’ll make them sick,” he returned. “Poor innocent old Bungs! Fatted calf for cannibals!—Do you remember Papa Bulobu?” he suddenly asked me.

“In the cattle tower, eh?” I replied.

“Gad, Joey,” he cried, “we’ve seen some times together! And you never finished that yarn. On the river, you remember? Some old priest with horns and feathers.—”

“Look here,” I broke into his chatter, “we’ve got to get away from here. I’ve thought of a plan.”

“The devil you have!” he interrupted me. “But what’s the hurry? We’re as safe as houses here. The lions versus the eagles. Look, they haven’t the stomach to hoist themselves through the funk-hole. Shouldn’t wonder if that’s old Bungs. Lies heavy, I should think, old Bungs.”

We were disturbed by a shouting from the poop, which was answered by the slaves on the fore deck. We could make nothing of the vociferous duet except that it sounded angry, until Dusty hit on the explanation.

“They can’t get away,” he said, “and they’ve had nothing to eat.”

This was a new element in the situation. If they stampeded forward and deserted their post the poop deck could be retaken; and if they remained on watch they looked likely to starve. But now came a further evidence of leadership. Some dozen slaves broke from the cover of the barricade and leapt for the poop, and a few minutes later the relieved detachment rushed for the fore deck. At each action the muskets spoke, and a few of the slaves fell. But they could afford such losses.

“The changing of the guard!” Nick said.

It was more than that. The newcomers, we soon noticed,

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had their eyes upon us. We noticed too that most of them were armed with cutlasses, picked up doubtless from the fallen during the first encounter. For a little they watched us, chattering among themselves and pointing as though discussing plans. Then it became clear that they were chosen men; possibly of a different tribe from the rest, for they could climb. They did not need to resort even to the rat-lines, but dividing into two parties to either side of the poop came swarming at a signal up the back-stays.

Slobbers gave a scream, and promptly scrambled to the very mast-head, where he had never before ventured. Nick drew a knife from his belt; but the rest of us were unarmed. We had no time to make any concerted plan of defence, and so did the most foolish thing: scattered along the yards. Precisely what happened after that I don’t know, for I found myself at the end of the top-gallant yard with a great savage crawling towards me with a cutlass in his teeth. I let him come to within a foot of me, then slipped down the sail and brought up on the point of the top-sail yard beneath. I saw him above me, peering down, an enormous shadow against the moon-lit sky, with the curved blade glittering to either side of his mouth like a pair of tusks. Then he began deliberately to lower himself, pausing for a moment with his hands gripping to the yard above, his body hanging towards me at full stretch, his face bent forward still regarding me as though to mesmerise me from escape. Then he gathered up his knees, tightening

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them upon the sail. I turned to make back along the yard to the mast, but there was a figure on guard there cutting off my retreat. I could have slipped down to the yard below, but in that way I should be driven to the deck where there would be no chance of deliverance. I was preparing to risk a fall and throw all my weight upon the fellow as he came, shoving him from his hold. But just then I saw Nick above me, stooping over my pursuer. With a flash of his knife he cut clean across the stretched wrists. The great creature dropped like a stone sheer into the sea. The next instant I was back again on the top-gallant yard beside Nick.

The chase was by no means over; but we were nimbler than our hunters. For my part I spent my energy in avoiding them, but Nick dropped on them like a leopard, striking them down, and scrambling back to me with knife dripping. Once he secured a cutlass which he gave me. "Now you can defend yourself," he said, and accordingly left me to it. I presumed he had gone to care for Dusty and his companion. I installed myself at a yard end and waited. The slaves on deck maintained a continuous whooping, but aloft sometimes all went still, then there came sudden rushes of bodies, scrambling along the spars, sliding down ropes, cries, and once or twice a heavy thud. Slobbers, I noticed, was still secure at the masthead. They would not touch him, I knew, for he was the only creature on the ship of whom the slaves stood in awe; and indeed, outlined against the stars with his bestial crouch and angry

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jabber he was like some moon-struck divinity of the darkness presiding over some lunatic rites.

There came a moment when the whole chase seemed to have drifted to the other side of the mast. I decided that it was time to put my plan into action. I slithered down to the deck, made for the nearest loop-hole in the cabin, and shouted to the man there to have the ports opened and ropes lowered for we were going to swim for it. "Whistle when all is ready," I instructed him; and the next moment I was clambering up the rat-lines with one of the slaves in chase. I yelled out to the others to tell them what I had done. Nick and Dusty answered with an "Ay, ay!" but Slobbers was too insane with terror to understand me, and the other fellow, it seemed, had gone. "Jump when you hear a whistle," I called again, in a fever lest they should miss my meaning. "There'll be ropes at the ports. But wait for the

whistle.” Again they shouted “Ay, ay!” And a minute later the whistle sounded.

I was already to leeward, and in a trice I had swung clear and was in the sea. The poop loomed over me at a sharp tilt, with a space of light cut squarely in it outlining the head and shoulders of a single figure like a picture in a frame. I struck out for it, and in another moment was being hauled head first into the cabin, dripping like a dog.

Nick and Dusty followed, though I didn’t know it at the time. I was spluttering the water from my mouth

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and shouting, “Where’s the Captain? I must see the Captain.”

I didn’t wait to be led to him, but broke through the lobby and into his apartment.

“Sir,” I cried, “the poop’s well nigh deserted. You can rush it with half a dozen men.”

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CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

THE CAPTAIN was sitting at his table, his arms thrown across it with hands clasped, his body leaning forward, his face lifted full upon me, a motionless grey shadow in the centre of the little chamber lit only through a single port by the shimmer of the moonlight striking upward from the water.

He made no sign to show that he had heard me, but sat like a man in a trance, his eyes in an unseeing stare, the lines of his face malignantly set as though from long ferocious brooding.

I called again to shake him from his stupour: "You can retake the poop, sir, with half a dozen men. It's well nigh deserted."

"So, Joey," he said, still without a movement of head or limb, yet with a sly lift at the corners of his lips, "ye would have me fight?"

I was taken completely aback. But I had no time to answer, for he suddenly shouted for Oslo; and the mate appearing at the summons, "Take six men, Mr. Oslo," he said, "and carry the poop."

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"Ay, ay, sir," Oslo replied, and made back for the cabin to collect his force.

"Ye see what trust I put in your counsel, boy," the Captain said, still with that suggestion at his lips of malicious cunning. "And now, shut the door," he ordered.

I obeyed him, hearing as I did so the stamping of feet up the companion in the lobby without, and the forcing of the hatch.

"So then, Joey," the Captain repeated, "ye would have me fight?"

A few scattered shots sounded dully from above, a short scuffling and thumping shook the boards over our heads, there were shouts, and the splash of bodies thrown into the sea. Then all was still.

A moment later Oslo reappeared. "The poop cleared, sir," he announced, "and the ship on her course."

The Captain acknowledged the report by a lift of the hand, and Oslo retired, closing the door behind him.

"Ye don't answer me, boy," the Captain pressed me again.

He had me at a disadvantage, and I mumbled, "I'm under your orders, sir."

“Sulky, hey?” he cried, his face losing its malice and becoming almost jovial. “And a minute gone your voice was like a trumpet, and there was the light of battle in your eyes.”

“I was excited,” I said.

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“It suits ye, lad,” he told me. “It shakes the stupidity out of your face. And it heartened me to see ye. I was lost in a dream, knowing all that black mischief a-foot. Like a bear at a post beset by curs. Whelps of the Devil! — And then ye were calling on me to fight. But they told me ye weren’t in the cabin, Joey. What’s been happening to ye?”

“I was up the mast,” I said.

“Aloft, with your eyes open,” he took me up, “while I was shut below. But ye look more like a corpse from the sea.”

I felt like it too, and was barely able to keep my teeth from chattering. But he was too obsessed with his own thoughts to notice my distress.

He asked for my story, and I gave it to him, in niggard outline, while he listened with slowly nodding head.

“A boy’s adventure,” he commented when I had done. “But I thought ye were beginning to draw alongside, Joey. Once ye would talk of surrender, but now ye would have me fight.”

“I would have you possess your ship,” I found my answer at last. “There was no one at the wheel.”

He sat up sharply at that.

“And where would ye have me steer for?” he asked.

His renewed antagonism angered me.

“Steer where you will,” I cried, “but your course is already charted. Warning after warning you have had,

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and still you are blind. Calm and storm and mutiny——”

“Stop!” he shouted.

“Blind! Blind!” I shouted back.

“Ye would have me return to that coast,” he thumped the table with both hands, thrusting his face at me aflame with passion. “But here’s my promise to ye, by the living God! If I return, I return with an empty ship. They shall not know the salvation of the Lord. They shall not see a Christian land. They would rise upon me! They would mutiny!—Fifteen

years!—They shall be hewn in pieces and thrown to the Devil that begot them. Mutiny!—”

“You are a man of blood,” I said.

“Stop!” he cried again, starting up and leaning tremendously over me, with his long bearded face drawn and white and his eyes in a dry glitter. But I was worked to a frenzy, and I had no fear.

“You are a man of blood,” I shouted the more loudly. “You are a man of blood, and your God is a God of blood, and your worship is hate, and your work is destruction. It is evil, and evil must come of it. Evil——”

“Joey!” he cut me short with the single word, spoken with surprising tenderness.

The wildness had gone out of his face. He sat down heavily, with his head in his hands.

“Captain Andrew,” I said, shaken by a sudden remorse, “I will never forsake you.”

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“Go, lad,” he waved me away. “Ye’re cold, and ye’ll need some sleep.”

Nick had a dry shift ready for me in the cabin, brought up from the store-room under the Captain’s apartment, and I had soon thrown off the worst of my chill; but though I curled myself resolutely into a corner I was unable to sleep. In a while, too, it was my turn to stand by one of the loopholes, musket in hand, to keep watch over the deck.

The space before me was strewn with bodies, one or two moaning, and stirring uneasily where they lay, but most of them were inert. Beyond the barricade a glow in the air and on the sails showed that the slaves had a fire burning. Possibly they were still at their feast. Occasional sharp quarrels broke out, and the noise of fighting; and now and then a woman’s scream.

Papa was next to me. Once he nudged me with the butt of his musket. I saw him screw his eyes into a wink, and nod across towards the slaves.

“One woman to ten men,” he said.

It was the plainest statement I had ever heard him make, and the instant picture it called up set my teeth gnashing. Thereafter I found myself listening to distinguish the women’s voices from the men’s, my imagination at every cry envisaging horrors.

It was a weary watch. During it nothing happened, and at the end nothing had changed.

I handed over my musket to one of the relieving guard, and looked around for Nick. I saw him settling

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down by the far wall of the cabin. I was making towards him when, passing by Dusty and Fritz who were squatting together, I heard Dusty say, "They got old Pips, the devils!"

"Pips!" I exclaimed, immediately arrested.

"*Ach*, then that's sorry for us," Fritz said.

"They cornered him on the fo'c'sle deck," Dusty told us, staring stonily before him. "I was up the fore mast, and I saw it all. He only had his knife. And there were twenty of them against him at the least. He ran out on to the bowsprit and then turned to meet them. Cool as a fish. They couldn't touch him. One after another; he just knifed them down. Then they drew back and howled at him like wolves. Sat up on their haunches and howled. He showed them his knife, and grinned at them. Then they started to throw things at him. All sorts of junk: kids and buckets and such-like. That didn't hurt him much. He handed them off like snowballs, grinning all the time as though it was a game. Then someone threw a marline-spike, and that got him. Got him clean through the eye. They set up a yell and rushed in upon him, but he dropped into the sea; just rolled quietly over and dropped into the sea. They screamed down at him like a lot of angry vultures. The ship gave a kick and toppled two of them over, and the rest came scurrying back as though the Devil was after them. But I didn't see old Pips again. He must have gone down like a stone."

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"It's very sorry, very sorry," Fritz repeated. "He was a naice boy, Pips."

Dusty's face had lost something of its refinement, and there was an unpleasant bitterness about his thinnish lips.

"The swine will squeal for it!" he suddenly exclaimed.

"*Ach*," Fritz agreed, "that's of course."

Whether it was Dusty's words, or an unusual grating in his voice, I don't know; but it came to me at that moment more clearly than ever before that white sank readily to black, but black lifted with difficulty to white. There was no particular virtue in the thought, but for some reason it brought Plasters back to my mind, tantalising me to connect it with the mystery of his death.

Nick, as I joined him, called me sharply back to actuality.

“Have you seen the Bose?” he asked.

“No,” I answered. “Why?”

“Hm!” he grunted, “and you’re not likely to, the old sod!”

“Been getting you into trouble?” I asked, not knowing what he was driving at.

He laughed shortly. Then drawing close and speaking almost in a whisper, he said, “If you want him, you’ll find his carcass below. Unless they’ve stewed him up with old Bungs.”

“I don’t want him,” I replied.

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Nick seemed put out about something. He hugged his knees and looked moodily in front of him.

“The Old Man never showed during the dancing,” he said; “but now he’ll keep his eyes skinned.”

“Is the bo’sun dead then?” I asked, beginning vaguely to comprehend.

“Properly spoilt our fun,” Nick went on. “The silly swab had his keys on him. And the little bitch got them, just when he went blind, and then stuck a knife in him. Must have done. He hadn’t even the guts to shout us a warning. When I saw him lying there I thought he was just asleep. He always liked a good dose, the Bose did, and then to sleep it off like a hog. Besides, I was—occupied. I didn’t know she’d done him in. And then she must have slipped up on deck and unlocked the chains.”

“My God!” I said, understanding him fully at last, “then Old Sawny was right.”

“And there’s that little kid of mine,” he continued, “over there in that reeking stew. You can see the sods at it from on top, wallowing all over the deck. Randy as bulls that haven’t smelt a cow for a year. She’s probably ripped to pieces by now.”

In spite of my disgust his next words nearly made me laugh.

“A princess——”

I suppose he sensed my amusement, for he burst out at me, “Don’t start sniggering, for Christ’s sake!”

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“I was thinking of Slobbers at the truck,” I excused myself, as that grotesque image rose unaccountably to my mind. “He makes a fitting flag

for this ship of ours to sail under.”

Nick turned his back on me, hunching himself into a ball on the floor.

“Of course,” he snorted, “if you find it funny——”

I found it horrible beyond words. I saw no light, no hope. Life lay around me like a hideous swamp, sucking into itself all goodness, all beauty, all faith, involving our human companionships, our human pities, in a slough of monstrous defilement, where no path could endure, no banner could stand.

Somewhere in the cabin I heard Cocky’s voice raised in ludicrous boasting: “Lumme, I knocked three of ’em aht. Three great swabs they were. But I let ’em have my fist, boy. Blimey, they went dahn like skittles _____”

So Cocky had come through; but Pips had gone. I suddenly realised that I had been very fond of Pips.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE

IN THE morning we could take better stock of the situation.

The slaves were mostly sleeping now, sprawled about the deck, gorged and exhausted from their revel. A few of the women, taking advantage of the men's prostration, had already, before the break of dawn come creeping aft, entreating piteously to be taken into the cabin; and one by one others joined them. They were in a dreadful condition, lacerated and bleeding, trailing broken legs, nursing dislocated shoulders. But the Captain refused us permission to admit them, and they crouched up against the bulkhead whimpering like hurt animals.

I wondered whether the Captain would launch an attack. Armed as we were I could yet see no chance of success, because the numbers were too hopelessly against us; but remembering the Captain's threats of the night he seemed to me in the mood for any wild slaughter. However, it became clear that he intended to await developments. Except for the helmsman and himself he

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kept the poop clear. There was, of course, a wisdom in this, because if the slaves assaulted us the poop would have to be surrendered, and the fewer there the better the chance of their escape below. Yet it was harassing to be kept in confinement, with no word of any plans, no promise of action. Eventually the slaves would come to life again, and meanwhile, though the ship was being conned, yet we remained prisoners and the slaves were in possession.

We waited in this way during the whole of the morning, and through half the afternoon.

It was at about five bells when the slaves at last began to stir. To begin with they paid us little heed, but busied themselves about the try-pot preparing their meal. But this over they seemed to become aware of us again.

We were called sharply to stand to. From the cabin we could see little of what was going forward, shut off by the barricade; but we could make surmises from the clamour beyond that grew more and more angry. There was a great thubbing of tubs, and hoots, and the stamping of feet in a dance.

The slaves were working themselves up into a frenzy preparatory to an attack.

And all at once they were swarming over the barricade and were hurling themselves upon us. We answered with our muskets, firing at targets impossible to miss; but it did not stay them. They leapt at the loop-holes, to be driven back with a musket-butt in the face or dropped with a bullet through the head; thrust in

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arms to seize our weapons, to spring screaming away with dismembered stumps slashed through by our cutlasses; charged bodily against the cabin, making it tremble to their onslaught; clambered over us to the poop, stamping as though to break through the boards. It was a tempest of wrestling limbs and demoniac faces, of whoops and shrieks, with no purpose but anger, no plan but force. And there appeared no promise of an issue, because though we were overwhelmed with numbers we seemed secure in our retreat.

The Captain must have yielded the poop at the first rush. From time to time I saw him in the cabin, with set commanding face, and sharp eyes surveying the defence. In that dim-lit atmosphere charged with smoke he appeared and vanished like a ghost. I never heard him issue a command; nor did I see him so much as open his lips. The orders came from Oslo, bellowed above the tumult at the full power of his tremendous lungs. At one time it was, "Pick off the men with weapons," at another, "Shoot down the men in clothes."

Some of the slaves had rifled the fo'c'sle, and were dressed in odd scraps from our dunnage: a jersey, a pair of pants, a blouse, or merely a night-cap. Yet these trifles were significant. They must have been prizes eagerly coveted, and so marked their wearers as outstanding men, stalwarts if not actually leaders. Consequently the more ornate our assailants the more particularly we singled them out, and had soon laid a number on the deck. Whether there were one leader above

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the rest was not immediately apparent, but a rumour went round that there was a chief among them, and he was commanding the battle from the poop.

As for the men with weapons, these were few enough. Most of the slaves were fighting with their naked hands and shoulders, tearing at our

barricade or striving to stave it in. Their efforts could be ignored. But a few had armed themselves with hammers and axes from the ransacked carpenter's shop, and these smashing and hacking at the loop-holes, and others leaping in and stabbing with gimlets and chisels, were more dangerous. Fritz, a chance glimpse showed me, had a cheek laid open. Others I found were hurt, too, though I could not see them for the smoke; for presently some one touched me on the shoulder and said, "Captain's orders, Joey; you're to look to the wounded."

I found a supply of bandages in Plasters' cabin, and for a little I knew nothing of the course of the fight, occupied with my new duties. There was work for me too, for a number of our men had been severely struck in the face, and unpractised as I was I had to put in stitches, and even set a broken jaw.

Unexpectedly I found the cabin in peace. The attack had drawn off. But it was a respite only. A second assault was soon upon us, and after a further respite, a third.

This was more serious. The attack now was no longer from in front but from on top. It had needed a severe lesson to suggest the need of this to those primitive intelligences,

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but once the manœuvre had occurred to them they put it into vigorous action. We became aware, no longer of a mere stamping of feet above us, but a hacking with axes. Eventually they were bound to break through, and a hole once made they could drop in among us more quickly than we could shoot them down. There seemed nothing we could do to prevent them. To make a sally from the hatch would be suicide, and there was no other way to come at them. There were only two courses open: to break from the cabin and rush for the masts, in the hope that some passing vessel might chance to our rescue, or retreat to the state-rooms as a final stronghold. We should be dreadfully confined, and our enemies could break through the roof there as they were breaking into the cabin. It would grant us a little time, a further short breathing space before the end came, no more. Yet it was on this that the Captain decided.

The wounded were sent down to the store-room below. I was not actually ordered to accompany them, so I remained with my mates. We were allotted in groups to the few cramped apartments, each group being responsible for its own defence; but one company under Oslo, whose cabin

was the most easily accessible, was left by the lobby door to take what toll they could as the slaves dropped through. The rest of us set to barricading the doors and piercing them for firing.

Meanwhile the Captain had had several casks brought up from the storeroom and taken to the cabin. I thought

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they were powder-casks, and believed for the moment that he had it in mind to touch them off and blow the whole ship to smithereens. But in any case there was no time for that. While a cask was still being set in place the slaves broke through. Oslo's party began to fire. As long as they had muskets and pistols loaded to hand the assailants were picked off as they came, and indeed for a little the attack was held up. But the slaves fell to widening the hole, and came tumbling through three and four at a time. Oslo shouted to retreat, slamming the lobby door behind him and shooting the bolt. I expected the next moment to see the door smashed down, for the bolt would give at the first resolute blow. But the slaves seemed to be content for the time with their success. We could hear their bodies thump one after another into the cabin, which filled with their howling. With every minute the howling swelled, growing to an insensate rage of triumph. Yet still they let us be, while we waited with pistols cocked, peering at the closed door.

I have no idea how long that lasted. I only know that the night came upon us, putting the lobby into complete darkness. And the babel continued, inconceivably ferocious. Yet its note changed. And the ship trembled with stamping feet. They were dancing as though at some demented orgy. Had they found further victims? We wondered.

Then there was a thumping above us, and the sound of an axe on the hatch. The attack had recommenced.

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In a few swift blows the hatch was pierced, letting through a gleam of moonlight. We gripped our pistols. But it was Slobbers only. He was screaming down at us to let him in.

The Captain roared back at him, "Stop your noise there, and tell us what's a-foot on deck."

Slobbers paid no attention to the order.

“Open up, yer bloody lubbers!” he still screamed. “Christ, haven’t I bin up the mast all day with not a swab on yer to bring a feller a drop o’ drink? Let me in, and be damned to yer, let me in!”

He fell to again with his axe, and in another minute had squeezed himself through the aperture and was down the companion, where he set to hammering at the doors, running from one to another in turn, dementedly yelling, “Let me in, yer bastards, let me in!”

Captain Andrew’s voice again roared out, “Stop that noise, blast ye, or I’ll shoot.”

At the sight of the pistol at his head Slobbers collapsed to the floor, where he sat chattering and sobbing in complete panic.

“And now,” the Captain said, “just speak up and say what’s happening on deck.”

It was a long time before Slobbers could be induced to reply. At last, however, he sprang up, like a creature tormented with a goad, and with face pressed to the door of the Captain’s apartment shrieked out, “Vamoosed into the cabin, every damned son of a whore of ’em. Every damned son of a whore.”

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The Captain opened his door, and resolutely ascended the companion.

We had been so taken up with Slobbers that we had forgotten the slaves. Now we realised of a sudden that they had fallen strangely quiet. Only one or two voices sounded from the cabin: some in a shrill laughter, some in an angry quarrel, a few in a quavering discord of songs. But these came detached and distinct above a silence so peculiar that they might have been the last maniacal cries of the survivors in a company smitten with plague.

Suddenly we heard the Captain shouting to us from above in a voice ringing with triumph:

“Out, boys! The Lord has delivered them into our hands!”

The interposition may have been divine, but the instrument had been borrowed from the Devil. The casks that the Captain had set in the cabin had not contained powder, but rum. The slaves had immediately sensed the spirit, and had fallen to the snare.

We found them in swinish prostration, heaped one upon another like animals. They were helpless in our hands, even the few who were still awake offering no resistance; and we shackled them where they lay.

Then working forward we cleared the deck of the dead; but reaching the fo'c'sle we were drawn up short by Cocky who stood at the entrance pointing excitedly within, and exclaiming, "Blimey, there's a whole lot

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more on 'em!" It was the women, withdrawn deep in shadow, crouched together in terror.

For a little we pressed in a crowd about the doorway, peering in at them, where they huddled, silent, cowed, unmoving, their eyes gleaming whitely as they stared back at us out of the darkness. Then some one broke into a lewd oath and pushed roughly in.

The rest followed in a rush, carrying me with them, and seizing on the women haphazard dragged them to their bunks.

I heard Nick's voice in a scream, "By God, you'll not touch her!"

"Why, damn you!" somebody answered. "There's plenty more where she come from, ain't there? But I'm not pertic'lar about the little bitch."

I pushed back to the door, and came upon Monsieur Louis standing there looking in. For a minute he remained at watch, stroking his delicate chin; then he showed me a level glitter of teeth, and turned away.

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CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX

BY THE morning the slaves had mostly come to their senses. Cramped as they were in tumbled confusion in the confinement of the cabin, it was surprising that on coming to they did not set upon one another with limbs and teeth in a struggle for ease and space. But except for a few who lay dazedly moaning they did not so much as utter a sound. We found them as we had left them, sprawled over one another like monstrous lizards, showing no sign of consciousness but in the wide astonishment of their eyes. To their amazed minds, stupefied with the spirit, their liberty of a night and a day must have seemed like some fantastic illusion.

We dragged them out and disposed them to either side of the deck. It was with me now instead of with Plasters that the Captain made the round of them, as before singling out any that were too far gone to be worth treatment. But this time these were not unceremoniously tossed into the sea, but set aside for another purpose. With them, too, were ranged all that wore any article of apparel, for these, it was assumed, were

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the ring-leaders of the mutiny. Among them was one equipped from head to foot, with a Union Jack for a bandana, a green shirt, blue trousers, top boots, and a wide scarlet sash about the middle stuck with a couple of pistols. Here obviously was the prime villain of all the mischief, the chief of whom we had spoken; and he was set under a special guard. Now that he stood self-betrayed it seemed surprising that we had not noticed him before. He was a superb savage, topping the Captain by half a head, with the muscles bulking along his limbs in knots and cords, and a chest like a gorilla's. His face, too, showed a ferocity of command, but with shallow forehead and prognathous lips was empty of intelligence. It was to this that we owed our salvation. He had smashed his way victoriously through our defences, but had yielded to the rum.

An example was to be made of these men; but the penalty was not immediately inflicted. The Captain, it was clear, in order that the lesson should be the more heedfully appreciated, intended that the slaves should witness it, not in their present maze of stupefaction, but with minds alert. Accordingly it was postponed until the evening, when with two good meals

inside them, and the fumes of the liquor dissipated with the fresh air and the sun, they were restored to the full possession of their faculties. Then the chastisement began.

Oslo was in actual charge of the proceedings, enormously enforcing the utmost rigour, but Captain Andrew throughout remained on the poop surveying it with set

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face, motionless as a statue, with arms folded high on his breast. Whatever emotions may have been raging within him, he showed nothing but a stern determination. Yet Monsieur Louis, standing a little behind him, presumably conning the ship, symbolised for me in his attitude of callous amusement the malice at the Captain's heart which, in his self-blindness, he refused to recognise; just as Oslo symbolised his brute ferocity of purpose.

The sick and maimed who had been set apart in the morning, of no further use as merchandise and condemned in any case to be thrown into the sea, served now to swell the numbers of the victims and so to make the ceremony of expiation the more impressive. They were slung up by the wrists and flogged to death, then tossed to the sharks who followed the ship like familiar spirits. The leaders were not flogged, but with hands and feet lopped away were hanged still living at the yards. The chief suffered in the same manner, but to distinguish him above the rest was in addition blinded with hot irons and hideously mutilated about the face.

It was all as horrible as the slaughter in Bulobu's compound; for though it was not so sickening in its wanton atrocity, and though to the Captain at least it must have appeared invested with the dignity of justice, yet to the crew looking on, and bearing a hand, its appeal was unmistakably that of vengeance. Bearing a hand; because, although previously all punishment had been relegated to the native guard, yet now only

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two survived, having concealed themselves by some miracle among the casks in the hold, and it would have been impossible for them to cope with so many victims unaided. Accordingly, though the work of mutilation was left to them, yet the men were obliged to take turns with the whips. I excused myself, taking advantage of my new rank, and no pressure was put upon me. Whether, if others had declined, they would have been similarly released, I don't know; for none declined. I saw no shrinking, no least

symptom of unwillingness, rather they laid on with a passion that showed them still in a fever with the memory of their fear; and long before the end they were laughing and shouting to one another in brutal encouragement, rolling up their sleeves and spitting into their hands in savage anticipation, their eyes hungry and inflamed.

From that day they seemed to me changed men; or at least it was from now that I became acutely conscious of a change in them. It may have been that my imagination had taken a taint from the abominations I had witnessed, and was growing diseased; or it may have been that my sensibility was chafed to awareness by their treatment of myself. But I felt the matter did not end there. As for me, I had always been something of a favourite, or so I had believed; for my mates would take from me what they would not take from another. But now they became openly hostile to me. I was a prig, because I would not touch the women, and had held aloof from the scourging; and even my old offence of

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deserting the ship at Molumbo was revived as an added charge. All this was very understandable, for though I made it a point never to upbraid them by a word, yet my abstention was in itself an implied condemnation. Also they had the grievance of jealousy, for having taken Plasters' place I was relieved of certain duties; though not entirely relieved, because after the losses we had sustained the ship was seriously short-handed. So in one way and another, with no desire for it and no power to prevent it, I found myself lifted to an unenviable superiority over my mates which turned their companionship into a stupid but vexatious persecution.

This was wretched enough, but it was not all. With time and patience I felt I had it in me to win back my forfeited friendships. But the men had changed more fundamentally than in their mere attitude towards me. All except Old Sawny, and possibly Nick. For Old Sawny, long since immune to all shock and all surprise, had settled to a kindly acceptance of good and evil as random fortuities uncontrollable like the weather; and Nick in his boyish resilience could shake off a nightmare experience like a pair of shoes. But it was not so with the rest. They became moody, uncertain, grumbled at every order, quarreled at a word and fell readily to fighting. Though they would recall with a disgusting relish the sight of the slaves in their drunken wallowing over the cabin floor, yet the next minute they were

complaining bitterly that the Captain's manoeuvre had reduced their rum ration "to no more'n a spit." And as

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a further inconsistency they murmured that the Captain by losing nigh two thirds of his cargo was robbing them of their promised share in the enterprise, yet gloated over the memory of the flogging and hanging, declaring that the "Ole Man knew proper how to handle them black cattle," and vowing with such oaths of blood to "flay their filthy hides off of 'em and pickle 'em alive in brine" if they started another racket that you might have thought they would welcome a second mutiny for the chance it would bring them of consummating their vengeance. And this was not mere talk. In the morning and the evening, when the slaves were haled up on deck for their ablutions and chained around the bulwarks, or stowed below in their places for the night, they were subjected to a wanton flogging and kicking as though they were untamed animals; and the hint of a dark look at any moment of the day would be punished by the instant slash of a whip or the blow of a fist in the face. Nor was it only the rougher hands who behaved in this way. Papa took to bullying like an enraged pedagogue, screwing his bushy brows into a ludicrous indignation, and kicking out with immense and clumsy feet. Fritz, who once used to pet the boys, squatting with them on the deck with his arms about them, chattering and chuckling, or giving them titbits from his mess-tin, would now clout them mercilessly if they approached him and curse after them as they scuttled away. Dusty, with eyes haggard and lips in an unnatural compression, seemed permanently reminding himself of his

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threat to make the swine squeal. And all three of them in the general reigning tyranny were as forward to strike as the rest.

I am doubtful whether the Captain was aware of all this, for as he paced the poop, or stood at gaze by the weather rail, he seemed lost in a reverie as though there were some matter on his soul which kept his eyes beyond the horizon; but it was condoned by Oslo and Monsieur Louis who knew well enough what was taking place, and who far from suppressing it had the air at least of giving it their approval. They knew also of the intercourse with the women, which after that night of suddenly snapped discipline had

spread to pretty near the entire crew. And here was fresh matter for discord, for the men had their favourites and fought over them like cats.

I was glad now to have the doctoring to occupy me. I don't pretend to have made much of a hand at it, but, priggish as it may appear, it was pleasant among so much that was cruel and bestial to know that I was doing something to relieve the suffering that seemed to weigh upon the vessel like some ugly cargo. Moreover it released me from a company where I had become distasteful, and the work it provided more than compensated for an occasional sarcastic "Morning, Shikko!" followed by references to boils and fluxions too crude to record. And at times Nick would hunt me out in the hospital under the fo'c'sle, and lend me a hand with the cupping and plastering; and you can imagine that in

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my loneliness and despondency his companionship became trebly valuable. Not that there was any sentiment about Nick. He would chaff me in his old manner, greeting me with, "Hullo, mopes!" and racing into a chatter about his "little kid;" whom incidentally I had in my care for a couple of days, as Nick's prognostication that she had been ripped to pieces was something more than a shadow of the truth.

"Why don't you let me find you a partner?" he asked me one day. "A little bit of warm comfort, eh? It's a good prescription, as you ought to know now that you're a doc. Something to put you 'in the grain,' you remember? Even old Plasters had his moments of insight."

"Particularly when he cut his throat," I said.

"Oh, damn!" he cried. "If you hadn't put that kid of mine to rights I'd chuck you over. But debts of gratitude, and all that; it wouldn't be quite decent. Still, some of those people make me pretty sick. You're not a bad ass at bottom, Joey; it's up at the top that you're all adrift. It isn't Rita, I suppose; tender fidelity to the dead, and that sort of thing?"

"It's the slaves," I told him.

"I'm a widower too," he reminded me. "And Gad, Joey, we don't get much money, but it'll be something to look back on, all this. Life in England! Tame? What the hell did we find to do all day? Sit on our buttocks and grow a belly! I'll tell you what, Joey, when we're quit of all this, we'll set up a factory on our own account. Damn it, we've had enough experience between

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us. Honest if you like; I don't care. But not too much of the commandments; they can't stand the climate. Besides, you've conscience enough for two. The Old Man calls you his conscience, doesn't he?"

I laughed rather bitterly.

"It's an unpopular member," I said, "especially when you have to play the part for a whole ship's company. And I seem to be paying the price just now."

"Lamentations, Ezekiel, Daniel, Hosea!" he exclaimed. "If you're going to weep I'll cut my painter. But honestly, think it over. Old man David found it a good tip. They're pretty well booked up, of course, and relations are apt to be strained. But if it came to it, I wouldn't mind sharing—for a friend."

Meanwhile my work increased on me. An immense despair had settled upon the slaves. They sat all day cowering at the bulwarks with hunched shoulders and heads sunken on their knees, many of them in spite of the superb blue weather shaking in every bone. A heaviness of silence seemed to lie over them like an inhibition. Here and there one might be seen swaying from side to side and muttering to himself, and in a few hours would probably be in a frenzy of raving. But they barely talked among themselves; and there was no laughter. At the sound of a footfall or the darkening of a passing shadow they would shrink together in fear; and when the drums struck up in the evening they would rise apathetically and jig through their circles with blank faces and lifeless limbs, crooning their songs as though

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in a dirge. For all the flogging it was difficult to induce them to feed; and swallowing on compulsion they but grew the thinner for their victuals. My tonics had no power to revive them. They were wasting visibly away, every day one or another simply dying where he squatted with no wound upon him and no sign of a disease.

"It's the anger of the Lord," the Captain said; but his words rang false.

"You will return as you promised," I told him, "with an empty ship."

Then for some three days it blew up heavy weather. It was nothing to the hurricane we had passed through, but it was enough to keep the slaves below under closed hatches. In their debility they had no strength to resist the poison of the long confinement. When they were eventually released the miserable remnant that could stagger up on deck seemed in the last

stages of exhaustion. A number, of course, had succumbed, and were thrown over the side. But the greater portion remained below, too weak to move.

It was my duty to examine them. By what effort of the will I retained my senses through the invading stench, I have no conception. I swathed my nose and mouth, and crept from one to another, not daring to return for air lest my fortitude should desert me.

For the most part their malady was clear. They were taken with the flux, which explained the slippery planks and the reeking atmosphere. I administered such medicines as I had, though knowing it to be hopeless. Then

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I came upon a case which both puzzled and alarmed me; for I found a man with tongue lolling from his mouth black and swollen, and his skin in a freckle of yellow spots. It was plain, too, that he was nearly dead.

I scrambled up to the deck with an unreasoning dread upon me, and made for the Captain's cabin.

A word was sufficient.

Captain Andrew sprang for the poop.

"Mr. Oslo," he shouted, "clear the slaves from below! Throw them into the sea! Bring the stores to the cabin and batten down the hatches! And look sharp, sir!"

It was the plague.

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CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN

IT WAS Mousieur Louis who attended to that work. Oslo must have instantly divined the significance of the Captain's orders, and his bull's courage wilted like grass in a flame. I had seen him fight single-handed with half a dozen of the mutineers, but the first hint of plague paralysed him from all action. He gaped back at Captain Andrew without so much as an "Ay, ay, sir!" and Monsieur Louis being set to the job, he remained by the poop rail, gripping it with both hands, his great face peering over stupidly a-stare.

Monsieur Louis was as cool as you could wish. The men were in two minds whether to obey, seeing Oslo above them an image of panic. But Louis called them sharply to fall in before him, and seeing them trailed across the deck in a ragged line, by another word brought them smartly into rank like soldiers on parade. His eye went rapidly along them alert for missing faces, and Old Sawny was despatched to whip in the shirkers. When the company was complete he drew himself up in front of them and said, "If those bodies are left

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below we shall all be dead in a week. If the stores are not brought up we shall starve. And if any one neglects his duty," he ended in a tone that cut like a knife, "he shall be battened down under hatches with a day's ration. He won't need more. So step lively!"

Then he divided the men into two parties, one to carry up the provisions, the other with grappling hooks to drag out the slaves, living and dead, and toss them into the water. In less than half an hour the job was done, the hatches clapped in place and sealed with pitch, and then moving in a line along the deck the men were set to examining it inch by inch for any crevice by which the hidden death below might exude into the upper air.

The whole ship's company became possessed by a passion for cleanliness. From peak to stern the vessel was swept of its refuse, swabbed, scoured, and washed with vinegar, and the fo'c'sle, cabin and state-rooms purified with burning tar. Clothes and bedding were brought out on deck, laid upon the boards and scrubbed, and hung up in the sun to dry. Bugs and cockroaches were hunted down in a ruthless extermination. Bodies were

submitted to unprecedented ablutions, throats rinsed, nails pared, beards razed, and heads shaved to the skin.

Our instinct was for nakedness and air. We wore the minimum of clothing, even setting upon and stripping those that carried anything above the waist; and we slept on deck.

If the wind had held we would have felt comparatively

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safe, but it rapidly fell away, and once again we were becalmed. Beneath us the sea slackened to an oily heave, and above the sun beat upon us with the palpable violence of a furnace from a sky resolutely empty of cloud.

A horrible suspicion settled upon us. We watched one another for the first sign of dizziness. If any one lurched in his walk he was shouted to keep at a distance, and was obliged to hold himself apart, whether working or feeding or sleeping, until he was again considered safe. There still remained some forty slaves, and our eyes were constantly upon them in a furtive scrutiny. Some of the men openly grumbled that the Old Man ought to send them to follow the rest. If we won to port now there would be no money in the enterprize; not for the hands. It was different for the Old Man. He could still turn a pretty penny; but there would be nothing for the hands. But he was greedy, "like all them fellers given to religion; greedy as a shark."

Cocky, as you can imagine, gave particular voice to these complaints. Already on the following day I came upon him, during the first dog watch, squatting in the shade of the galley among a group of his cronies, jerking his head in puerile sagacity, and lifting his child's voice in a pretence of bravado, but careful to keep it out of ear-shot of the poop.

"Lumme," he was saying, "he don't fink uv us. A good skipper should fink uv his men. A skipper wot's worf his salt should put his men fust. But he don't fink

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uv nuffink but number one, that's wot it is. Keeping all this black muck abaht. Breeding-grahnd, that's wot it is, a breeding-grahnd fer the plague. Gor blimey, but I shouldn't wonder if he wants ter do us in, the whole bloody shoot uv us, I shouldn't wonder. He's mad as Bedlam, ain't he? I shouldn't wonder. But I ain't goin' ter be done in, not just fer 'im. Not likely. An' if yer had any spunk among yer yer'd git up an' chuck that

black muck over the side, yer would an' all. Chuck it over the side under his very nose, yer would. If yer had any spunk among yer."

The men growled in agreement, but no one moved, sitting with huddled up knees, and eyes moodily on the horizon from which no wind came.

"Pulling at the blamed yards all day," some one said. "Fat lot o' use in that."

"I'd set them niggers ter pull if I had my way," another took him up.

"It's a judgment on 'im," Cocky went on. "A judgment, that's wot it is. I don't know nuffink uv religion, but I knows a judgment when I sees one. A man can't go carrying on like wot he goes carrying on an' not hear nuffink abaht it. All this flogging an' murdering an' such. Yes, an' wot abaht the river? Burning an' killing uv fousands uv pore innercent niggers wot 'adn't done 'im no 'arm. I told yer 'ow it ud be. Didn't I tell yer? Yer can't say I didn't tell yer. But lumme, yer wouldn't listen ter me. That's wot it is. It's follered us all along; that's wot it is. That, and the way he's carried

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on after. Them niggers don't ferget, let me tell yer. I've met men wot's seen things, an' I knows. Breeding the plague among 'em; done fer the purpose, it's more'n likely, 'cos they don't ferget. Yer can't play games wiv them niggers, not wivaht yer pays fer it. I knows, 'cos I've met men wot's seen things, I tell yer. An' they ain't finished yet. Yer'd best git up an' chuck 'em ter the sharks afore it's too late. An' yer would an' all if yer had any spunk among yer. But ye're scared, that's wot it is. Ye're scared."

Somehow the men did not chaff him now, but endured him as though he had penetrated their secret, while his voice shrilled monotonously on with a tormenting persistence.

"Pulling at the blamed ropes all day," the complaint was repeated, "when there ain't a breath of air. Stoopid I calls it."

Fortunately Old Sawny still remained as a composing influence.

"'Tan't no sort o' use talking," he began with a grunt, as Cocky was blowing up for another outburst. "No sort o' use at all, that it an't. Things happen as they happen, an' that's all there is to it. The Ole Man's had his luck, an' now it's turned agin 'im. Caught 'im full aback, it has an' all. But yer can't reckon on that. It an't here an' it an't there. It's just as may be, it is an' all. If the Ole Man's fer pulling ahead, I'm wi' him; an' if he's fer pulling back, I'm wi' him. Yer can't say one way nor tother. Yer never knows. A man's job's ter do

wot he's paid ter do, an' no questions; an' that's the holy truth. But if yer get ter asking the reasons o' things, swelp me Gawd, yer'll soon be talking an' putting a end ter yerselves, yer will an' all; like that pore feller wot cut his throat. Always asking the reasons o' things, he were; an' at last he took an' cut his throat. That's wot comes of asking the reasons o' things. 'Tan't no sort o' use, that it an't. An' 'cos why? 'Cos there an't no reason. You trust an ole man. When yer've had a life of it on the sea, up an' down, one place an' another, wind an' sun, calm an' storm, an' berthed wi' every shape an' colour the Almighty thought fit ter conceive, an' seen men die easy, an' men die hard, an' some wi' a comfertable passage wi' a mate's arm, it might be, along under their 'eads, an' others wi' a knife in the gizzard or a shark a-nibbling of 'em or rotting away wi' the scurvey, ay, or it might be wi' the plague, why yer'll say there an't nothing to it one way nor tother, yer will an' all. Yer never knows why, an' yer never knows when, an' it's a far sight better not ter meddle. An' ter go asking the reasons o' things, ter say it's this way or ter say it's that way, hanging in the wind, it is an' all, an' yer'll not make port that fashion, you trust an ole man. But there, don'cher mind me."

"Mr. Oslo," Cocky started on a fresh tack, "he'd chuck 'em over in a jiffy. Not Moussou, not 'im; he wouldn't. But Mr. Oslo, he'd chuck 'em over...."

This sort of thing endured for several days. The

Captain kept the men busy at the ropes, as he had done during the calm that had held us at the mouth of Cannibal River. I doubt whether for all his manœuvring he made a mile of headway; but he must have felt the need for occupation, as idleness would have bred insubordination in that atmosphere of uneasiness and suspicion and discontent.

For myself I was glad to join in the work of the ship. There was little doctoring for me to do. With the few remaining slaves on deck, and no further signs of the plague, a couple of rounds a day completed my duties. My mates, too, seemed to have forgotten their grievances against me, and tolerated me at least without molestation. Indeed, they even accorded me a certain respect. "Will it blow over, Shikko?" they would ask; or "What d'yer think, son, is there likely ter be more on it?" as though the Captain,

by the mere naming me doctor, had endowed me with the qualifying knowledge. And as the days passed with no outbreak of the pestilence some of them, I believe, came to regard our immunity as due to my care. They would tilt their heads and smile at me as they passed with a "Stick to it, Shikko. Yer'll save the old ship yet."

Then one morning two of the women were stricken.

For a while there was complete panic. The men had held aloof from the women for a day or two, but in their growing confidence some had recommenced their intercourse. These were immediately hounded away

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from the rest, and forced to keep to the fo'c'sle deck. Among them was Fritz; but not Nick, though he came near a fight to retain his place.

It was Cocky who denounced him.

"He's one uv 'em," he declared, as we were at breakfast. "Lumme, didn't I see 'im? On'y last night. He's one uv 'em, I tell yer."

Nick made a single leap and took Cocky by the throat.

"Now you lying little sod," he cried, "if you say that again I'll wring your neck like a chicken."

Two or three set rough hands on him and dragged him back, while Cocky screamed, "Don't touch 'im. Blimey, he ain't fit ter touch, I tell yer."

Nick shook himself free, and became at once all fists, springing in and away, and shouting, "Come on then, if you don't believe me." He soon had a space about him. Then folding his arms and striking a defiant attitude he said, "You can call me any name you like; but I'm not a fool."

Cocky began again: "I seen 'im, I tell yer," but no one hindered Nick now, and at a single threatening step Cocky readily changed his accusation to, "Well, if it weren't you it were some cove mighty like yer, 'cos I seen 'im."

All our earlier suspicion of one another was aroused afresh. A few kept entirely aloof, shrinking away if any one approached, even climbing out on to the yards during their watch below, looking out for symptoms with frightened eyes. Others clung together in groups

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of three and four, seemingly terrified at the menace of isolation. And all looked darkly at the slaves, and muttered curses on the women.

That evening some of the men, having screwed their courage up to it by an infinity of boasting, waited on Captain Andrew in a deputation. They made their approach through Oslo, who quite possibly was the prime instigator, for he had never lost his first fear, and had moved about the ship like some hunted monster, his enormous voice reduced to a husky bark, and his huge frame gaunt as though from long starvation. For some inconceivable reason Papa had been chosen spokesman. As he stood at the head of his confederates, waiting under the break of the poop for the coming of the Captain, he seemed by the working of his face to be experimenting with his features for an expression of fierce determination; but by the time the Captain appeared on the poop above he had only achieved an amiable anger which would not have deceived a boy.

The Captain folded his arms and surveyed the group before him with a mournful indifference.

“Well,” he asked, “what do you want of me?”

“Sir,” Papa began, unable to control a wink, “the men wish me to suggest, to prevent the possibility of infection——”

“I know what ye would say,” the Captain interrupted, his face suddenly severe, “and it is folly and wickedness. These people are in my care, and I must answer for them, body and soul. While there is life in them

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they shall live, and God willing, they shall yet know the blessings of a Christian land. Ye may go.”

He remained there looking down on them, where they hesitated a moment, shuffling on uneasy feet, and one or two shrewdly poking Papa from behind and encouraging him with husky whispers. But he quailed before the Captain’s dominating regard like a schoolboy taken in mischief, and touching his forelock turned foolishly away.

As soon as the men were together under the shelter of the galley they fell to recriminations. “Lor’ lumme,” Cocky broke out, “wot’cher matcher wiv yer, yer great stoopid fool, ain’cher got a word in yer mahf? Blimey, not a word, ’e ain’t. Why didn’cher start in an’ tell ’im straight? No nonsense, yer should ’ave said, an’ no hanky-panky, yer should ’ave said, ’cos we wants them niggers off uv the ship, yer should ’ave said, an’ let ’im know we wasn’t ter be played wiv. An’ wot’s he ter fink uv us nah? A pack o’ stoopid lubbers wiv not a word in our mahves. That’s wot he’ll fink uv us nah. A pack o’ stoopid lubbers wot ’e can twist rahnd his finger. That’s

wot he'll fink uv us nah. An' all along uv you, yer bloody great stoopid dumb cow! ..."

It was an altogether ludicrous incident; yet it was indicative of a lurking resentment, the more insidious for its being denied expression. The Captain realised this, for shortly afterwards I was summoned to his cabin, and immediately on entering he said, to me,

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"There's mischief afoot, Joey, and I want ye to help me."

"Yes, sir," I replied.

"I want ye to tell me," he went on, fixing me with fierce and earnest eyes, "which of the men I may rely on."

"Do you fear mutiny, sir?" I asked in alarm.

"Fear!" he cried.

"I beg your pardon, sir," I said.

He snorted, as though to control his indignation.

"No, not mutiny," he told me. "There's not a man on this ship would look me in the face. It's what they'll be after when my face is turned that I *fear*." He stressed the word ironically. "Even my officers; that's the pass it's come to. So, boy, I want ye to tell me—which men be true?"

"You misjudge them, sir," I said; "they talk, but they mean no harm."

The Captain glanced down, drumming for a little on the table.

"Ye do not care to answer me," he said at length, again with his eyes searchingly upon me. "So then, I will not press ye, boy. But ye'll pick out such as ye can trust, and ye'll report to Mister Louis. There'll be a watch needed over this ship tonight, or with the morning ye'll find the slaves gone."

I exclaimed at that, but he cut me short.

"Ye spoke just now of fear, Joey. Fear is blinder

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than lust. Fear is crueller than hate. Fear will make men terrible as tigers."

I immediately sought out Nick, and told him of my commission. He was at once agog as though at some novel frolic. Old Sawny was easily persuaded to join us, and Dusty we won over with a little coaxing. In my capacity of doctor I approached Fritz, still in isolation on the fo'c'sle; and he also fell in line. Then I went to report to Monsieur Louis.

He was lying on his bunk, reading, and he received me so, not so much as looking away from his book.

“It is a little matter,” he said with an affected carelessness. “You can arrange it among yourselves. You watch, that is all. The Captain is concerned for the slaves. Also they have some value. You must arrange it that two of you are awake. If there is any attempt during the night to—dispose of the cargo—you will notify me. That is all.”

As it happened the night passed without disturbance. But in the morning two more women were dead, and the infection had spread to the other slaves, for one was clearly sickening.

It was Captain Andrew himself who without more ado put a bullet into him, and ordered his carcass to be thrown into the sea.

CHAPTER TWENTY-EIGHT

THERE WERE other cases during the day.

The calm still held with no sign of breaking. The sea fell to a milky smoothness, heaving and subsiding as though in its entirety from horizon to horizon. Not a fleck disturbed its even sheen, except where a seabird touched, or a shoal of flying fish clattered glittering into the air to drop back to the water like a driven rain. But the surface softening over them lost all memory of their passage. As the day advanced the blue transparency of the sky thickened to a livid haze, which reflected in the ocean showed it like a disk of glowing metal. The atmosphere, stagnant with heat, closed about us with a crushing pressure.

An uneasy silence lay over the vessel like a menace. The men sitting in knots together, or leaning in twos and threes over the bulwarks, muttered in subdued undertones. Cocky's tongue was as busy as ever, but his voice lost its shrillness, and became a throaty whisper. Such commands as were issued came startling like bursts of thunder, but were swallowed without echo

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as though the air were hung with invisible draperies as in some chamber of death.

The day laboured up to noon, and like an overburdened beast staggered sickly on to evening.

We felt there would be need for the guard that night, and sharing the hours between us we set ourselves to watch in pairs, one to either side of the deck. There was no moon, and though the sky was cloudless yet a blind film seemed to be spread under the stars. The masts and yards indeed stood out in black relief, webbed sharply about with rigging, and hung with a grey ghostliness of sails, and the bulwarks were defined against the pallid water in running curves of shadow; but the deck between lay in a pool of darkness. Standing figures showed in silhouettes cut off at the waist, but the crouched bodies of the slaves were barely distinguishable in the enclosing gloom. A man might creep the length of them unobserved.

Nick and I took the first spell. There was nothing to be done upon that idle ship, and the watch for the most part squatted together under the galley.

We patrolled our charges from time to time with as inconspicuous a pretence of aimless strolling as we could assume; but later handing over to Dusty and Old Sawny we had nothing suspicious to report.

Dusty was not entirely reconciled to this supervision to which we had persuaded him. Something of his vengeful bitterness still lingered.

“I tell you what, Joey,” he said, “I’m half inclined

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to let the men have their way. It was different before; but they’ve taken it now, the black swine, and it’ll go through them like a wind. It might be more merciful. Besides, we need to hang together now, and this sort of thing sets us against one another. You don’t know what it may lead to. If it comes to fighting, it seems mighty silly to fight against your mates for a lot of niggers. What do you think?”

“We’re under orders,” I told him, “and I don’t care to think beyond that.”

“Well,” he took me up, “the Old Man’s made a fair mess of it, hasn’t he?”

“If the men had obeyed him earlier and kept away from the women,” I retorted, “there’d have been no mutiny. We owe it to him now to stand by him.”

“Well, I don’t like it,” he said weakly. “But I suppose I must hang on for another night.”

Curiously enough it was Dusty who gave the alarm. Some half dozen men were creeping towards the slaves with drawn knives. It was the gleam of the knives that he saw, and he ran immediately for Monsieur Louis. Monsieur Louis was on deck in an instant, and interposed himself at the very moment that the men had reached the slaves. He stood smiling down at them, with his hands behind his back, rising and falling on his toes. One of them sprang up and growled threateningly, but the rest shrank away, cowed by his sardonic amusement, and the bolder man turned and shuffled after them.

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“One minute,” Monsieur Louis called them quietly to attention. “I’m saying nothing of this to the Captain, but remember there are still eyes on this ship.”

He strolled back to his cabin, whistling lightly, raising his eyes, so Dusty told me, with a supercilious malice towards Oslo on the poop.

The incident was closed swiftly and without disturbance, and Dusty was not involved from first to last. This was as well, not merely for his sake, but because the appearance of Monsieur Louis was the more impressive for its being so unaccountable, and though the men bragged and threatened among themselves they were visibly shaken. If there were a further attempt it would be with open violence.

The morning showed the plague established beyond all power of prevention. Ten of the slaves died that day. Or rather, at the first clear symptom of dizziness or vomiting they were dispatched with a bullet and dropped over the side.

It seemed inevitable that the crew would take the contamination. I provided myself with Plasters' little bottle of pills which I found in his cabin. The Captain, I felt, would hardly order his own men to be shot, and the pills suggested themselves to me as a merciful quietus.

Yet when it came to it I shrank from administering them, because the first to succumb was Fritz.

He had taken his share in the vigil of the night, but

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had retired in the morning to his station on the fo'c'sle deck. I think the men would have admitted him again to their company, but he was too proud.

"They not like me now," he told me. "They say me unclean, isn't it? Then I not speak with them only; that not necessaire. But you come sometime, Joey, and cheer up a poor fellow, yes?"

I did so occasionally. And once he said, "I think, not quite happy in my head. I think, perhaps, the sun. But dat's never mind."

I looked at him sharply. He tried to laugh, but rolled heavily over where he sat.

"Fritz," I said gently, my voice near choking, "have courage, old man. You're—you're not well."

"Dhat's never mind," he repeated.

I didn't know how to tell him.

Then suddenly I blurted out on a sob, "Fritz, don't you understand? It's the plague."

He looked up at me with his face for a moment in a paroxysm of terror. Then he smiled with an extraordinary sweetness.

“Well, dat’s also never mind,” he said.

He tried to draw himself up, but collapsed in a half swoon.

I drew out my bottle of pills.

“Take this,” I told him, shaking one into his hand.

“Good, yes?” he asked, his voice in a weak whisper.

I nodded my head.

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He put it to his mouth and swallowed it. I don’t know what the poison was, but it was swift and painless. His body fell limp. He was dead.

I went aft and reported the matter to the Captain. He was on the poop, his eyes set as ever as though on an infinity. He received the communication without a word. Merely his long face took on an expression of immense sadness.

I was moving away when the ship seemed to lurch beneath me. I put my hand to my head in a sharp fear. But the next moment I was reassured. It was indeed the ship that had stirred, lifting to a slow undulation which I could see moving across the water as though with the passage of some submerged monster.

“Joey,” Captain Andrew called me back, “I can smell the wind. Can ye see it?”

My eyes went round the horizon, which on the starboard bow was in a play of scurrying cat’s-paws.

“Yes, sir,” I said, pointing; “yonder!”

“Where away?” he asked.

“On the starboard bow,” I told him, with my hand still raised. “Yonder!”

He turned his face at my indication with a rasping “Ha!” Then “Warning after warning!” he fell to repeating those old words of mine. “Calm and storm and mutiny! Wasn’t that it? And now the plague! But while there’s a slave alive,” he declared with a rising passion, “I’m driving full ahead.”

“Yes, sir,” I said.

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“One, if it be but one,” he went on, “it will be a sign from the Lord.”

“Yes, sir,” I repeated.

“Have ye any ointment for the eyes, boy?” he suddenly put to me the surprising question.

“Why, yes, sir,” I told him.

“Ye might put it in the cabin,” he said.

I saw now that his eyes were unusually inflamed, the heavy rings beneath them swollen as though from long watching.

“Are your eyes troubling you, sir?” I asked.

“Didn’t ye say I was blind?” he shouted, with a harsh laugh.

I thought he was fooling me, and I turned away. Then I came to a halt, remembering. There had been eye trouble among the slaves during the last day or two. In my ignorance I had put it down to the glare of the deck. But now I went sick with an appalling suspicion.

Captain Andrew laid a hand firmly on my shoulder.

“Are ye ill, boy?” he asked, with unconcealed emotion.

“No, sir,” I answered.

“Why, ye frightened me,” he said. “Ye frightened me. I cannot have ye ill, Joey. The doctor ill?” and he laughed uncertainly, patting me on the head. “But ye’re sure ye’re not ill?”

“Fritz was a friend of mine,” I forced myself to say, and left him.

Light gusts began to reach us, and with yards trimmed

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to them we tacked gently forward, with the air sweet about us, and the sea slapping pleasantly against the sides. But there was Fritz to bury, and with the wind contrary the men were in a grumble that we ought to put about and make back for port.

As for me, I went to Plasters’ cabin, and hunted among his books for information on the symptoms and remedies for ophthalmia.

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CHAPTER TWENTY-NINE

THE WIND blew persistently from ahead, and we made but little progress. Yet it freshened the atmosphere, sweeping the ship of its loaded infection like a broom. The plague, which after its first stealthy creeping had leapt in upon us like a tiger, now seemed to draw away appeased. But in its place came blindness.

The Captain appeared less frequently on the poop, and remained for shorter spells. His flushed eyes and straining sight were obvious to the men, who were already asking if it were the “thalmy”; and their sidelong glances towards the poop, their nods and winks and grins, their sudden way of falling together in a whisper, were ominous of their intentions when the Captain, robbed of his sight, should be powerless against them.

The disease was spreading with alarming rapidity. For some reason the wind, which seemed to have stayed the plague, was no check upon the ophthalmia. The slaves were stricken to a man, several already completely blind, and in their new wretchedness they squatted under

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the bulwarks, the poor remaining score of them, in a dumb inertia of gaunt limbs, drooped heads, and hunched up bony shoulders. They presented to you, as you stood before them, a line of shins as shining and as sharp as knives, clasped across with fingers like knotted bamboos and surmounted with kneecaps like the heads of hammers, their shaven polls between fallen forward from curves of back knobbed down the spines with starting vertebrae. And these were our masters, not by dominance of manhood, but by the corroding emanation of their decay.

This was a period of uneasy waiting. We were divided now, as Dusty had said we would be, into two parties. Or rather into three, for there were some, like Slobbers, who belonged to neither side, but kept suspiciously aloof as during the first panic of the plague, eating their meals apart, and spending their off-duty hours on the bow-sprit or in the cross-trees. These could be neglected. But there were some half dozen, grouped about Cocky and Papa and openly in league with Oslo, who were biding their time to strike; and there were we four with Monsieur Louis who had been set to watch them. Yet Dusty remained faithful. His thin face had lost its earlier

anxiety, but was set and hard with a bitter determination; and when he spoke it was hissing and with his lips in a sneer. He had the manner too of clapping his hands to his forehead and pressing them back towards the temples as though to crush away some fretting pain, at the same time lifting his face to the

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sky with his lips apart and his teeth clenched. At first this frightened me, thinking that the dizziness had come upon him, but I became used to it, and learned to make no comment when he broke out, "I hate it! I hate it! And it's all so insane!" As for the other party, they made no open show of hostility towards us. I doubt if they knew that we had our eyes upon them, fearing only Monsieur Louis. It was simply that they held together, mumbling in council, in spite of themselves betraying by their manner that they had laid their plans and could wait.

Then the wind began to dwindle, and once more the air fell to a calm; and the plague struck again.

Nick came to me one day and said. "Have you any of those pills, Joey?"

"Good God!" I cried in dismay, "not you?"

"No, not me," he said. "It's that little kid of mine. I'm damned if they'll put a bullet in her."

I gave him a pill, and he strode away with a jaunty courage.

The same day one of the lonely hands fell from the cross-trees in a sick swoon. There was no need to question his case.

Meanwhile it was noticed that Captain Andrew did not appear on the poop. He had already called for me, and I knew that he had completely lost his sight; but in spite of questioning I kept that knowledge to myself. But it was impossible to hide it from Oslo. He had slipped through the information, too, to the disaffected

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party, as was clear from their suddenly redoubled excitement, and the look of furtive triumph in their faces as they gathered in a knot and whispered together.

I felt the slaves would go to it that night, and by the morning Oslo would be in command of the ship. What else might follow I did not care to think. I warned my mates, singly so as not to arouse suspicion. And perhaps it was with a similar caution that Monsieur Louis did not call us into council; for

he must have known quite well what the Captain's blindness would involve us. Yet he gave no hint of being aware of any particular danger. With the fall of evening he yielded the poop to Oslo and retired below with no warning to us to be on our guard.

It was an hour later, when the darkness had barely settled over the ship, that Oslo struck. He made no pretence now to conceal his purpose. Yet it was not what I had expected. Coming down on deck he called his party about him, and they proceeded to one of the boats, stripped it of its tarpaulin to prepare it for lowering, then made for the cabin to provide themselves with stores. They were going to desert the ship.

I slipped aft to notify Monsieur Louis, and saw Nick on the other side dip under the shadow of the bulwarks and start creeping on the same errand. But there was no need. Monsieur Louis appeared at the cabin door, nonchalantly making passes in the air with a rapier, setting it in a flash with deft twists of the wrist, and watching the play of the point with the calmest air of unconcern

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in the world. The men gave back with a chorus of oaths; and Louis, as though observing them for the first time, stopped short with his blade lowered and said, "So? I too find it difficult to sleep."

Oslo had remained behind at the boat. Hearing Louis' voice he swung sharply round, and then drawing his cutlass came striding towards him.

"Avast there!" he roared, and with a sweeping blow rushed in.

I couldn't see what happened; but the next instant Oslo was prone on the deck, and Louis with his foot upon him was drawing his rapier from his breast.

"We do not perform burial rites for a deserter," he said. "Throw him into the sea."

It was Oslo's own men who heaved up the enormous carcass, and staggering to the side dropped it over.

"Replace that tarpaulin," Monsieur Louis commanded.

The men slunk off to obey.

Monsieur Louis strolled round the deck to assure himself that all was in order, then mounted to the poop.

I need not linger on the dragging horror that followed. The plague continued to take toll of us, but one by one, as though in deliberately delayed malice. One day it was the fellow on the bow-sprit, who without a

word dropped off like a dead fly. Another day it was Dusty; another, Papa. Dusty swallowed his pill with an air of vindictive distaste; and his face in death, with the thin lips drawn and the teeth showing, retained its

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set bitterness of features which had so recently usurped its more natural expression of anxious and kindly refinement. But Papa, when I offered him a pill, shouted me away with a lachrymose anger, and when it was clear that there was no hope for him Monsieur Louis settled him with his pistol. Our eyes, too, became affected with the ophthalmia. We bandaged them against the light, lifting the wrappings to obey an order, and drawing them over again when released. Several, like the Captain, were already blind.

We fell into an apathy. Cleanliness was neglected. In spite of the infection, we clung together for the little comfort there was in companionship. Men were not driven aloof at a suspicion. After all, none of our precautions had availed. And there was no predicting the next victim. Death struck haphazard, like an invisible enemy in our midst, fixing on this or that, without warning, without purpose. And sure of their daily prey the sharks circled about the ship, moving like grey shadows beneath the water.

Once I went to see Captain Andrew. But he had locked himself into his cabin, and would not admit me.

Then my eyes took the taint. I woke one morning with my lids glued fast, and when I bathed them apart tire world was a mist about me. The next day I was blind.

For a few days Nick brought me my meals. Then his sight began to fail. Before it entirely went he set a store of biscuit and a half cask of water in a corner of the

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cabin where we could grope our way to it. After this the life of the ships came to me in broken rumours. At first Old Sawny took turns with Louis at the poop, but Old Sawny failing Louis was left alone. At one time there were not three men who could see. Sail was lightened to a minimum, for if a storm blew up with the hands in such a pass the ship could not otherwise weather it. Five slaves still remained, I heard; and later, two of them had regained something of their sight. They were released and set to help the stricken crew. But the Old Man was still shut into his cabin. His meals were

set on the floor without. Later the empty dishes would be found there; but no one was allowed to see him.

Nick lost his gaiety. I would hear him beside me muttering, "Oh Christ!" I would hear also men creeping about the cabin, tapping at casks in a blind hunt for food. I learned to distinguish them by the shuffle of their knees. When Old Sawny came I would ask for news; not that he could know more than myself what was passing about us, but I liked to hear his amiable grunting. "News, son?" he would say. "It's a poor slice o' that I can hand yer, it is an' all. Here's the old ship sitting tight like a broody hen, and that's all there is to it one way or tother. If yer knows a prayer to any purpose yer might git on yer knees an' ask for a breath o' wind. I wouldn't be putting my tongue to such work myself 'cos it might do more harm 'n good, but ye're a pious feller, an' yer might git a hearing. But on'y a

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breath, son. Don't git bringing a gale down on us. But there, I wouldn't care ter lay on wot might chance, an' that's the holy truth. If we're ter come out, we're ter come out. An' if not, why, we got ter git to our berths one day or another, an' that's all there is to it, swelp me Gawd!"

Whether I prayed or not is neither here nor there. But the wind came, as before setting the ship in a premonitory heaving.

Suddenly I heard Captain Andrew's voice booming through the vessel:

"Joey Brown! Step along, lad, and look lively!"

I crept my way to his cabin, where he was still calling, "Joey Brown! D'ye hear me?"

"I'm here, sir," I said.

"Thunder!" he cried. "Why will ye frighten me so? Why didn't ye step lively?"

"I can't see, sir," I told him.

"Blind!" he exclaimed in a whisper. "Ye too, lad? Blind! But I need your eyes."

I reached for the table, steadying myself upright, for I felt the need to be on my feet.

"It's the darkness that clears the eyes," I said.

"Did I tell ye that?" he asked sharply.

"You did, sir," I told him.

"Then look in your heart, lad, since ye cannot look on the sky," he said with a savage solemnity, "and tell me—which way do I steer?"

“Is your own heart not yet clear to you, Captain

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Andrew,” I retorted with a defiant indignation, “that you should need me to look into mine?”

I could hear him breathing hissing as through set teeth. I could feel the table vibrate to his passion. And on the screen of my blindness his face pictured itself before me, bent upon me with fierce and sightless eyes, the features drawn in torment with the last convulsions of his breaking pride.

The ship toppled over in a slow roll; and a gust of wind set all the blocks in a rattle.

“Monsieur Louis!” the Captain suddenly called.

“Ay, ay, sir,” came the reply from above.

“Ye can stay aloft,” the Captain cried back, as Louis’ feet were heard on the companion.

“Ay, ay, sir.”

“In which quarter is the wind?”

“Sou’ west by west, sir.”

“Can ye work the vessel?”

“If the wind blows moderate, sir.”

“And how many slaves remain?”

“Five, sir.”

“Five,” the Captain repeated to himself, his fingers drumming the table. “Peradventure for the sake of five——”

Then abruptly his fingers stopped their play. He drew a deep breath, and I felt rather than heard him rise to his feet.

“Put the ship about,” he cried, rapping the command out sharply as though his authority had been called in question, “and run for land!”

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CHAPTER THIRTY

DURING THE days that followed I was continually in and out of the Captain's cabin. He seemed unwilling to let me from his presence. I would take my place opposite him at the table, and listen while his voice came to me out of the enveloping obscurity, or more simply accord him a mute companionship in his long spells of silence. He had grown astonishingly gentle. His talk was mostly of his boyhood, or at the other extreme of the day soon to come when he would return to his old home to rest. The gap between, so strenuous with labour, so violent with passion, and luminous like a tropic night with the sombre splendour of his perverse devotion, seemed to be wiped from his memory like a writing from a slate. It was only by a word here and there that he referred to the frightful calamities that had at last driven him back upon his course, or to the immediate goal before him.

I resented this change in him, the more so that I was the agent by which it had been wrought. When he reached towards me and patted my hand, and said,

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“Time to atone, Joey; time to atone. Good works; good works. The Lord is very merciful,” I felt it like a denial of his magnificent manhood, seeing him dwindling through an old age of beneficent repentance to a serene and sanctimonious grave. Yet I knew this ought to have satisfied me, and fretted at the knowledge. As he was never weary of telling me, his deep voice subdued to a penetrating resonance, I had been eyes to him in his blindness, I had weaned him from his pride, I had delivered him from the Pit. But this was not the image I cherished of him, this amiable husk of a man drained of vigour. Nor was this the end I pictured for him, with colours struck decaying peacefully in harbour. He had battled bravely and had been defeated, and I looked to him for some superb and defiant gesture, yielding to the storm like some splendid vessel, as I had once before thought of him in contrast to Don Ramos, with master at the helm and flag flying.

Meanwhile Monsieur Louis, with two of the slaves to help him—for now beyond these there were no eyes on the ship—was steering back for

land. Monsieur Louis, the man who believed nothing, yet who, for all his lack of faith, had remained astonishingly loyal.

There were further deaths. But Old Sawny still survived, and Nick, and Cocky, and Slobbers. I tried to reason out some purpose in this selection, the working of some august decree. But I could make nothing of it. For if it had been in my power I should have ordered it so differently, sparing many that had been taken, and

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stamping out without a qualm two at least of those that had been spared. For of what use was Slobbers, who now filled the cabin with a hysterical treble of lewd profanities? Or Cocky, muttering to himself, "Oh fawver!" Was life no more than a wind-shaken branch over a void for those to cling to who, by some fortuitous shelter, could still retain their grip? My eyes were not clearing with the darkness, but rather, turned in upon myself and upon the dreadful memories that possessed me, were like windows open to a night choked with fog.

The slaves dwindled to four, to three, and at last to the pair who were assisting Monsieur Louis. And the reports of their deaths, coming one upon one, revealed to me and confirmed a peculiar obsession of the Captain's. For on each occasion he broke out in his old masterful way, "Ye must have a care, Mister Louis. Thunder, there are to be no more deaths!" And when we were alone he would say, "There still remain three, Joey," or "There still remain two, yet if there is but one it will be a sign from the Lord." It was as imperative for him now to restore if it were but one of the captives to his native land as before it had been to convey one to a Christian country. Then, it was to have been as the divine seal upon his enterprise, but now, upon his repentance. I wondered how he would read it if the restoration were denied him. But every chance was in his favour, for the two remaining slaves, Monsieur Louis assured him, were completely clear of their blindness,

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and with work and freedom were as lively as monkeys.

Then there came a ray of hope. Nick declared one day that he was beginning to see, and later Old Sawny said to me, "Might that be you in the corner, Joey, or is it an ole cask? Yer might hoist a fist ter tell me." And when I signalled to him, "Why," he went on with brightening voice, "it an't

no more'n a flag in a mist, but it's summat, it is an' all. My head's bin so full of ole casks, wot with butting inter them in the dark, an' feeling fer a scrap o' vittles or fingering 'em up an' down an' round an' round fer a bung, that I didn't rightly know if I were jist gitting ter see 'em in a dream like. But I'm beginning ter make yer out, Joey; though ye're a bit of a smudge,"—and he came crawling up to me, peering into my face, as I could tell from his unwholesome breath upon me—"an' yer've bin growing a beard, yer have an' all, growing a beard, unless it's jist the muck o' the ship yer've got on yer, growing a beard," —he put a hand up to my chin and fell to chuckling— "when I thought yer mother's milk were still sappy on yer lips. Growing a beard, swelp me, Gawd!"

"Hi!" Cocky called, "if yer can see, cant'cher stop yer cackling an' bring a feller a bite o' sumfink. I tell yer I'm 'arf starved."

Yet the Captain and I, who had taken the contagion earlier, still remained blind, and I began to wonder whether I should ever see again.

It was an exciting moment, the more so for its utter

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unexpectedness, when we heard the cry of "Land ho!" It was Monsieur Louis who raised the cry, and the next instant he came clattering down to the Captain's cabin, where I happened also to be, to report the news. "Land on the port bow, sir," he said.

"Can ye make out where we are?" the Captain asked.

"Not precisely, sir," Louis replied. "It's only a fringe on the horizon."

"Draw in, and find out where ye are," the Captain ordered him; and Louis retired with an "Ay, ay, sir."

I was amazed at our speedy return. The wind, indeed, had been favourable, but it had been light; and we had been so many weeks beating out to sea. I don't know whether Captain Andrew divined my surprise, or whether he was merely communing with his own thoughts; but I heard him say, "Three hundred miles; we had made but three hundred miles. Calm and storm and mutiny; plague and blindness! But three hundred miles!" He drummed for a while on the table. Then this time addressing me, he said, "But there still remain two, lad. It is a sign from the Lord."

And now my sight also began to come back to me. I nursed it in the shelter of the cabin, afraid to look too early on the light of the sky. I let a full day pass over before I ventured on deck. And meanwhile the others were also recovering. Nick and Old Sawny were already back at their duty;

and Cocky and Slobbers were exchanging experiences of their dimly awakening vision. And lastly Captain Andrew, calling for me, peered into

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my face as I stood before him, and trying first one eye then the other, said, "I can see ye, lad; I can see ye—with my left eye. The other has been taken from me."

My first view from the deck showed me the coast as I had first seen it, a wall of sombre and formless vegetation above a white line of surf. But now I could penetrate beyond its forbidding blackness. I had probed to its ugly mystery. I had seen it in a welter of blood, had heard it in a throb of evil incantations. And looking upon it now I could picture behind the shadows dusky figures writhing in torment, shrieking in the intoxication of slaughter, capering in monstrous revels. It was against this that Captain Andrew had declared war. But there was a spell in the very hideousness of its horror; and it had drawn him back.

Yet one star still shone for me in the darkness; for I remembered M'bwala. Perhaps that too was a sign from the Lord.

For a couple of days we coasted, with the land to port, searching for a break in the surf where we could beach a boat. The Captain was on the poop now, restored to his dignity of command. The ferocity had left his face, but there was an intentness in it, an eagerness of purpose, which set in a white glow the drawn and suffering features pale from long confinement. And his eyes followed with a significant satisfaction the antics of the two remaining slaves, who, lively as monkeys and at home now in the rigging, chattered and scrambled about the masts and yards.

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Then in a sudden squall one of them lost his grip and fell into the sea.

Captain Andrew roared for the ship to be put about, and the squall over, a boat was lowered and search made till the night fell. But the body was not recovered.

The remaining slave was shackled to the main mast where Captain Andrew could keep him beneath his eye; and at night, in spite of our being so desperately short-handed, one of us was kept in permanent guard over him.

But now there was a change in the Captain's face. It was difficult to interpret the lowering taciturnity of his brow as he stood by the rail

scrutinising the shore, with a glance from time to time at the single slave squatting in a forlorn huddle by the mast before him; but to me it seemed like the look of a man in mortal dread.

We passed the islands about Molumbo. Still there was no break in the surf. We drew at last into the mouth of Cannibal River.

There was no mistaking the place, for on a headland to starboard a naked skeleton transfixed to a tree gleamed whitely against the looming background of the jungle.

The sails were stowed, and the anchor dropped. And hardly were we at a stand-still before we were called to lower the starboard boat. I believe I was the only one who had any understanding of what was intended. In token of his submission Captain Andrew was about to return that one surviving slave to his native shore.

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Two of us were sent to release him and take him to the boat. But in his loneliness, and so abruptly deprived of his new-found freedom, he had moped himself into a mortal despondency. He was dead.

It was I who informed Captain Andrew, where he stood waiting by the boat.

A knife at the heart could not have set him so sickly reeling. He staggered, with hands thrown gropingly before him, as though his blindness had come on him again. We ran in and caught him before he fell, steadying him on his feet, but with his full weight bearing inertly upon us. I thought by the ashen fixity of his face that the blow had killed him.

Then the jungle started into a throb of drums, sounding, though no figure was visible, at the very edge of the water.

Slobbers let out a scream and rushed for the rat-lines, while Captain Andrew leapt in our arms, and with a shake of the shoulders flung us from him. His face at that moment was aflame with a vital rage, as though the very life in him, like a fire or a hurricane, were sustained alone in its own self-consuming fury. The next instant he had sprung on to the bulwarks, balancing himself with his hands in the shrouds, and sent a wild halloo across the water, which was answered by a triumphant yell and a fiercely redoubled drumming. Then with face lifted to the sky he broke into a frightful laughter. It was not the laughter of a maniac with mind broken in torment. It was more terrible; because it was

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the laughter of a man in full possession of his reason, yet trampling his humanity beneath his feet with all the devil in him surgingly asserted in a glory of victory.

“There is no God!” he cried. “There is no God!”

He shook his fists at the serene unanswering heaven, challenging it with his blasphemy as he had challenged the jungle with his harpoon, then leaning forward plunged into the river.

We ran to the side, and watched him make for the land with great sweeping strokes, leaving in his wake a trail of foam as straight as the flight of an arrow. Reaching shallow water he rose to his feet and waded ashore, striking it by the headland immediately beneath the skeleton of the priest whom he himself had impaled there. For a moment he stood erect before it, then falling to his knees he began to creep into the jungle. The drums throbbed in a frenzy, and a single dark hand emerging from the bushes was laid upon his shoulder receiving him in.

A long cry arose from the darkness, a cry as of sorrowful thanksgiving, which sounded far up into the river. The drumming fell to a level beat, becoming fainter and fainter as it withdrew into the distance till it was absorbed into the silence of the jungle.

“Gor blimey, Joey Brahn,” Cocky exclaimed, “why don’cher go arter ’im? Yer dragged ’im back once, didn’cher? Then why don’cher go arter ’im an’ drag ’im back again? P’raps we sh’d ’ave some more fun then, I shouldn’t wonder. Why don’cher? Are yer scared?”

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It was Old Sawny who with a back-handed slap across the mouth laid him on the deck.

“Don’cher mind me,” he grunted, “but limits is limits, swelp me Gawd!”

He shuffled aft, mumbling to himself. “Reasons o’ things,” I heard him say, “asking the reasons o’ things——”

Nick took me by the arm, his hand closing in a firm grip.

“ ’Bout turn, Joey!” he said. “Clean sheet, pastures new and all that!”

I moved away.

Slobbers was jabbering down from the cross-trees, his madness returned upon him.

Monsieur Louis on the poop, with hands behind back, rising and falling on his toes, was looking across at the jungle with whimsically lifted brows.

Whether Captain Andrews was haled away to sacrifice, or reinstated as priest in the jungle he had served and ravaged—invested in horns and feathers to minister at unspeakable rites of lust and hate and carnage, in vengeance now not upon the spirits of evil that had ensnared him, but upon the Living God who had forsaken him in his despair—I never learned. Nor is it of any consequence. His story ended with his return, for that marked the cessation of his struggles. Yet—though the thought appals me—I cannot shake myself from the belief that, swiftly as he decided on that last action,

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it was taken not in any spirit of surrender, but as the definitive judgment of his divided soul.

For the rest of us, what does it matter? Yet we were obliged to burn the *Jehovah*, for a sail hauling over the horizon we recognised it as the cruiser that had earlier held us in chase. With so few to work the ship we could not hope to escape, and if we were captured the *Jehovah* would be sufficient witness to send us all to the gallows. We promptly set fire to her, and lowering a boat waited for the cruiser to pick us up. As it happened, night fell before she could reach us; and during the night Monsieur Louis had ample leisure to concoct a story to explain our plight, and to prime us in our parts so that we should all be in a tale.

Meanwhile the *Jehovah* blazed before us, filling the air with a rush and crackle like the noise of a high wind in a wood. The fire ate into her like a decay, undermining the masts and laying the ribs bare. Then suddenly, with the ignition of the powder casks, the whole stern went up with the spurt of a volcano, for an instant outlining against the darkness a red fan of flame spotted with black fragments of wreckage. It vanished in the closing of an eye, leaving the air in a rain of sparks which fell upon the sea about us with a fizz and patter, and like a luminous skeleton the rent hulk, prow in air, slid hissing beneath the water.

We were taken aboard the cruiser in the morning. Louis' story was skilfully contrived, to convince, not through a circumstantial elaboration of detail, but by

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the supreme art of a bare and lucid simplicity. Yet I don't suppose we were believed; but the cruiser was short of men, as two of the three boats that

had put after us—so we learnt later—had been swamped before they could reach their ship. Accordingly we were offered service, and accepting, no further questions were asked.

Old Sawny was soon discharged as being too old. Cocky deserted. Slobbers was landed at Plymouth in irons for one of his escapades with the axe. Monsieur Louis, being French, and having influence besides, eventually obtained his release.

Nick and I remained on the ship for two years. We had applied long since for discharge, as we had not signed on indefinitely, our agreement being, rather vaguely, till the end of the cruise. But no notice was paid to our application; so finding ourselves off Sierra Leone, and feeling the call of Africa imperiously in our blood—being aided moreover by a foggy night, and by a laxity in discipline due to our celebrations of the advent of a girl to the throne of England, which Nick said demanded a bold break with the past: “New worlds for old, and all that!”—we slipped over the side in the darkness, and swam ashore.

But our later adventures, both by land and sea, and our eventual re-establishing—though this time in honest trade—of the factory of Molumbo, and incidentally of our discovery of Don Ramos’ treasure-chest buried in the jungle, belong to quite a different story.

About the Author



Henry Burgess Drake (1894-1963) was a UK teacher, Orientalist and author, in active service during World War One, who wrote occasional Fantasy tales involving the occult. His most successful novel was probably the non-genre *Chinese White* (1950) as Burgess Drake, set in China during World War Two; but he is primarily remembered today for his first novel *The Remedy* (1925; and *The Shadowy Thing* 1928) because of its influence on H P Lovecraft. A young man with strong powers of Hypnosis inadvertently causes a fellow student to become possessed by an inhuman intelligence, leading to his insanity and death; the hypnotist proceeds to bring other people under his control, and finally, during World War One, escapes death by means of an Identity Transfer to the severely war-mutilated body of an acquaintance. The influence can be clearly seen in Lovecraft's "*The Shadow out of Time*" (June 1936 *Astounding*) and "*The Thing on the Door-step*" (January 1937 *Weird Tales*).

Other works of genre interest include *Cursed Be the Treasure* (1926), about a haunted pirate's treasure which protects itself from predators; *The Captain of the "Jehovah"* (1936), involving native Magic aboard a slave ship; *The Book of Lyonne* (1952) as Burgess Drake, a children's fantasy illustrated by Drake's long-time friend Mervyn Peake; *Hush-a-by Baby* (1952; and *Children of the Wind* 1954) as Burgess Drake, about a woman haunted by the spirits of her miscarried twins; and *The Woman and the Priest* (1955) as

Burgess Drake, concerning a struggle between forces of good and evil for spiritual dominance on a small French island. Drake also wrote the short Horror story "Yak Mool San" (1949 The London Mystery Magazine #1). He was the godfather of Peake's daughter.

Other works include:

The Remedy (London: John Long, 1925)

The Shadowy Thing (New York: Macy-Masius/The Vanguard Press, 1928)

Cursed Be the Treasure (London: John Lane, 1926)

Captain of the "Jehovah" (New York: Greenberg Publishing, 1936)

The Book of Lyonne (London: Falcon Press, 1952) as Burgess Drake

Hush-a-by Baby (London: Falcon Press, 1952) as Burgess Drake

Children of the Wind (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: J P Lippincott, 1954) as Burgess Drake

The Woman and the Priest (London: Peter Davies, 1955) as Burgess Drake

